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# PROVIDENCE OF GOD

MANIFESTED IN

## NATURAL LAW.

BY

JOHN DUNCANSON, M.D.

"A Providence must be proved from what we see of Order in things present. We must contend for Order; and in this part chiefly, where virtue is concerned."

*Shaftesbury's Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 277.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

THE opinions regarding the Divine Providence which at present prevail are not peculiar to our religion or to our age, but are taught by all religions, and are consequently coeval with human existence. There is, however, a growing feeling that these opinions not only fail to express adequately the views of the natural constitution of things now entertained, but are positively opposed to them ; and the object of this book is to advocate a conception of the Divine Agency adapted to the present state of our knowledge.

In this chapter, we shall endeavour to show that the views of Providence first entertained were the natural product of the primitive condition of the race. If we succeed in demonstrating that these views are not necessary truths, but simply conceptions which corresponded with the imperfect knowledge of the early ages, we shall prepare the way for the acceptance of views more in accordance with the scientific inductions of the present day.



We obtain little or no information regarding the very earliest condition of mankind from historical records. Traces of what may have been the primitive worship may be detected in the earliest literature of a people, or in religious festivals which are no longer understood by those who celebrate them. But by the time a literature is formed, and especially one so far advanced as to secure its transmission to our own day, considerable progress must have been attained, and in this progress religious belief would participate. As this literature would simply reflect the opinions of the age which produced it, we will learn from it little, and that little indirectly, of that prior condition to which the emotions had not yet found a definite and intelligible utterance.

Receiving little aid in this investigation from history, we are compelled to resort to *à priori* considerations. Here however we encounter enormous difficulties. We must assume that the subject is susceptible of scientific investigation. This most people, practically at least, deny. Either the religious opinions of a people are supposed to be determined by accident, to have no natural relation to their physical, moral, and intellectual condition, and to be susceptible of changes without any alteration in these conditions; or all scientific investigation is precluded by the fact of supernatural interference. It is very generally believed that the primitive religion was revealed to man by God Himself, and that

all the religions of the heathen world are corruptions of this one true religion, and exhibit traces of their derivation from it. No attempt is made to show that this corruption has taken place according to natural causes, the ingenuity of those who hold this opinion being exhausted in the attempt to detect correspondences between the mythologies of Greece and Rome and what may be learnt of the primeval religion of mankind from the Scriptures. Some indeed save themselves all inquiry by ascribing all false religions, and this includes all existing religions but their own, to diabolical agency, and consequently regard them as essentially and wholly evil; while others ignorantly include them all in one class and characterize them as senseless idolatries.

In the following discussion, we will assume that religion is the natural product of the human mind, and is related to the knowledge and culture it has attained, at the same time reacting upon them. If we believe that the true religion was revealed to primeval man, we cannot resist the conclusion that he was also supernaturally endowed with other attainments essential to the intelligent reception of that religion. A highly spiritual religion could only be understood by such as had made considerable progress in knowledge, and this would imply time; but as by the supposition no time had yet elapsed, this knowledge must have been imparted supernaturally. God must there-

fore have created man not only with the faculty of acquiring knowledge, but with the possession of a very considerable amount of it, to this extent relieving him from the necessity of exercising and thus strengthening this faculty. Indeed it is difficult to conceive how knowledge could be at once received by a mind destitute of the training which its gradual acquisition gives, so that we have not only to believe that the knowledge was revealed, but that the mind was also supernaturally prepared to embrace it. Man is thus represented as receiving what he was empowered to work out for himself, which seems opposed to that law of parsimony which has been observed in nature.

It is assumed that any religion evolved by man himself must necessarily be evil, and consequently to represent God as creating man, and leaving him to work out such a religion for himself is to destroy all distinction between true religion and false, between that which God approves and that which is an abomination in His sight. The evil of a religion does not consist so much in the intellectual conception formed of the object of worship, as in the moral character ascribed to it. This character is simply a reflection of that of the worshipper, so that the inquiry is thus confined to the moral condition of primeval man, and the origin of morality by growth or by intuition. The difficulties which attend the supposition that man was created simply with the capacities fitting

him to attain the highest civilization, and liable to all the evils incident to a state of development, are not avoided by representing him to have been created in a perfect state from which he fell. If it be said that evil exists by the appointment of God in the one case, the remark is no less applicable to the other. We cannot account for the necessity which connects evil with a law of development, and as little can we understand how a being created perfect should so soon manifest a depraved morality and profess a corrupt religion. Besides, what is abstractly bad may be relatively good. We may be very sensible of the defects and immoralities of heathen religions, and yet admit that they accorded with the character and state of civilization of those who professed them, that they were the only religions capable of greatly influencing them, and that their influence was on the whole beneficial.

It is impossible to give any satisfactory explanation of the early mythologies on the supposition that they are corruptions of a primeval religion. If the hypothesis of development has no historic basis, if it cannot be shown to be a *vera causa*, still it affords an explanation, and is supported by the analogy of other departments of nature. The very fact that there exists no historical record of the earliest condition of mankind is a presumption in favour of this latter view. It is in the highest degree improbable that a primeval religion would

so soon be completely lost, and leave no record of its existence, while the imperfect religions which succeeded it have in some instances been transmitted to our own times, and present no feature which can be recognised as having more than a vague and fanciful resemblance to the doctrines of what is assumed to have been the first religion. On the hypothesis of growth, we could no more expect to have any record of the primeval condition of man, than that the full-grown individual should remember the impressions received by him during the first months of his life. The formation of a literature is itself evidence of very considerable progress in civilization. The earliest literature is the recorded language of devotion. Long before this period was reached, a certain vague religious feeling must have pervaded the minds of men, which would not be associated with a definite creed till some one superior to his brethren arose to give an articulate expression to that which all felt without being able to utter. There could be no record of that which had not yet acquired a definite intellectual embodiment.

It is difficult to reconstruct the past, even with the aid of history. It is no easy task to leave behind all that is peculiar to modern civilization, to transport ourselves to the past, and to conceive what feelings and notions we should have in certain imaginary circumstances. We are extremely apt to view the past in the light of the present, as

in observing moving bodies we assume that we ourselves are stationary. We regard only that which corresponds with our experience, we suppose things slightly analogous to be the same, and we altogether ignore what has no equivalent in our own time. We look upon the classic mythologies as poetic allegories, and can scarcely realize the fact that the personages therein described were at one time believed to have an existence as real as that of the human race itself. It must be still more difficult to reconstruct the prehistoric ages. If we assume the hypothesis of growth to be correct, we must represent the primeval man to have been created with the capacity of acquiring knowledge, and of discovering his relation to the world around him, but without any inherited knowledge. We derive so much from our parents and that so early, and the accumulated stores of generations are so available to us, that we have great difficulty in conceiving what we would be if we owed nothing to the past. The primeval man would require not only to select the sensations of most use to him, and to make them the objects of his attention, but also to construct a language by means of which he could mark them. It is no easy task to conceive what aspect nature would present to one who had as yet no name for the infinite variety of phenomena it is continually presenting to the beholder. The language we inherit confines our attention and prevents us from being bewildered by the

endless impressions that burst upon the infant mind. Besides, with the names we are also taught the relations of things. "To the wild, deep-hearted man, all was yet new, not veiled under names or formulas ; it stood naked, flashing in on him then, beautiful, awful, unspeakable."\* Nature would present itself to him in an infinite variety of details which would appear isolated, until associations began to be formed amongst those which first arrested the attention. These associations would constitute a basis of knowledge which would be gradually extended, though its progress must have been much retarded by the multiplicity and complicity of the sensations pressing upon the attention. Of these innumerable sensations, a limited number, having certain specialities, would arrest the attention and be retained in the memory. Associations of co-existence and succession would be observed, and once observed would be anticipated. In many cases they would be realized, but when they were merely coincidences, or when some unknown cause interfered, they would not be confirmed by subsequent experience. Thus knowledge in primitive times, besides being limited in extent and slow of growth, would contain an element of uncertainty, in consequence of the frequent discovery of the incorrectness of the first hasty generalizations. The mental powers having little scope for exercise in positive knowledge,

\* Carlyle's Lectures on Heroes.

would exhaust themselves in imaginations. In our constructive associations, we are limited by the necessity of making them fit into our experiences, otherwise their obvious inconsistency would be offensive to our sense of truth, but when experience is very limited, this inconsistency is seldom felt, and the imagination may revel without any restraint. Before mankind attain a large experience, there is also more scope for the indulgence of emotion. When few associations were formed, there would be little in nature that would appear common or familiar. Most events, being regarded as isolated, would take them by surprise. Nature would retain all that freshness which is due to a first impression. Their interest even in that small portion of nature which arrested their attention would never flag. In such circumstances, the emotion of wonder would be largely indulged. But there is another emotion, that is ever more intimately associated with ignorance, and that is fear. Fear is produced by anticipated evil, and is greatest when the nature and extent of the evil is uncertain. Those who are exposed to many causes of apprehension, the nature of which they do not know, are apt to be terrified by the occurrence of any merely unusual event. The exercise of the imagination is favourable to the indulgence of the emotions. In imagination, volition is not so much called into exercise as in inductive reasoning, and when there is diminished control over the



ideas, there is also less control over the feelings. The primitive condition of man being favourable to the exercise of the imagination, thus allows greater indulgence of the emotions. The feelings again react upon the train of ideas. They absorb the mind and direct the current of our thoughts by resisting associations which call up incongruous ideas, and stimulating those which minister to their gratification.

Let us now apply these principles, which we have indicated rather than described, to the elucidation of the primitive religious beliefs. When man, destitute of inherited or acquired knowledge, first looked upon the world, his attention would be directed to those impressions which he would soon ascertain to be related to his bodily wants, and to those which most powerfully affected his emotions. He would observe that his actions produced certain effects, and that nature resisted his efforts and sometimes influenced him in a way he could not control. The effects of his own actions being the results of his spontaneous activity, would not only be the sequences most familiar to him, but those in which he was most interested, and would be to him the type of all others. He could not observe the less familiar effects of the surrounding world without assimilating them to the more familiar results of his own actions. Action is a general term for all motions which originate within the moving body, and the actions of human

beings are the most familiar illustrations. The actions of natural objects which do not manifestly derive their activity from foreign sources are classed with human actions, and the term thus receives a very general application. The effects produced by natural objects are thus regarded as produced by the activities of these objects and the objects themselves as agents. The general idea of causation is the product of a much more extended knowledge and clearer insight into the nature of things, and its place must have been long occupied by the hasty generalization to which we have just referred. Many of the things about us have obvious uniform relations to each other and to ourselves. The associations arising in consequence would be formed unconsciously in the mind ; and when one thing was observed, the thing related to it would be looked for simply because the ideas of the two cohered in the mind, and not because its appearance was required to satisfy a general proposition. A considerable number of such associations would soon become familiar, and those events alone which were unusual in their occurrence, or which had great influence on human affairs, would arrest the attention. Of all natural objects the sun is the one whose influence is most powerfully and beneficially felt, and we find accordingly that it is the principal object of worship in almost all the ancient religions. The effects produced by natural objects being regarded as actions, and the objects themselves as

agents, it would be an easy step to attribute intelligence to them. Intelligence and action would be closely associated, being found combined in man with whose activity all natural agencies were identified. Natural objects would therefore be regarded as animated by the presence of sentient beings to whom all their activity would be ascribed. Natural effects being considered actions would also be associated with motives, and as they were sometimes beneficial and sometimes hurtful to mankind, the beings from whom they proceeded would be supposed to be moved by affection or anger. The actions attributed to the animating spirit would at first be closely identified with the natural effects observed. In the *Iliad*, the river Scamander is represented as a god, but the actions ascribed to him closely correspond with the effects produced by a river. The ancient mythologies afford indications of a still more ancient religion in which the gods and the elements were identified. Zeus, a name latterly given to the god alone, originally meant sky as well. Indra and Agni, deities worshipped by the Aryans of Hindostan, were originally associated inseparably with light and fire. We observe a gradual process of separation of the animating spirit from the material embodiment; until the spirit is represented as a distinct personality having relations to man and altogether independent of the material influences which it was at first assumed to explain. Various causes must have contributed

to produce this separation. It would be difficult to conceive a spiritual being apart from a visible human body. Possessed of this body he would be independent of the material element he ruled, and would be able to withdraw from it. Invisible in the element, though giving to it all its life and energy, he assumed the human form on leaving it, his power being still manifested in some mysterious way in the element he abandoned. Various objects having the same power of affecting human interests would be grouped together, and one spirit would be supposed to animate the group. The spirit belonging to the whole group could not exist wholly in each member, and would necessarily be conceived apart from the material element. Men thus learned to generalize, but instead of an abstract idea, they conceived a spiritual agent. It seems strange to us that men should have believed in the existence and visible manifestations of beings which were wholly the creation of their fancy. We must remember that vivid conceptions of the mind may readily be mistaken for actual sensations. A person in a dream believes in the reality of the scenes he is imagining because this belief is not corrected by impressions received at the same time from without. The child also frequently mistakes its conceptions for realities, and it is some time before it learns to distinguish accurately between them. When the emotions are strongly called forth, the mistake is made the more

readily. They absorb the attention, and the present sensations which are necessary to correct our erroneous beliefs are unfelt. The conception which the primitive races formed of the gods must have been extremely vivid, and instead of being corrected by experience, nature without it would be a perfect enigma, wholly unintelligible to them. They would be like children in knowledge. They would have no idea of any bond of connexion between natural events, and any other conception than personal agency would be repugnant to their habitual mode of interpreting nature. Though children in knowledge, they would possess the strong emotions of manhood. In the presence of the irresistible powers of the external world they would be deeply moved by all those feelings that find expression in religious worship. Every unusual phenomenon would inspire them with wonder. Very little of nature had as yet become familiar or common-place. Observing the innumerable arrangements which contributed to their well-being they would also be moved by tender feelings; but with most races, and especially those exposed to suffer from natural causes against which they could not protect themselves, the emotion most powerfully called forth would be fear. These feelings are more naturally associated with the imagined personal powers of nature than with the material elements. Whatever is related to humanity excites in us an infinitely greater interest than mere mechanical phenomena. Our

fellow-men are the objects of our strongest emotions, and all their actions engage our sympathies. It was natural therefore that all interest should be centred in the spirits which were conceived to animate nature, not only because they were considered the active element, but because they were endowed with human attributes. Nature without their presence was lifeless, useless, and would therefore be so subordinated to the spiritual element as to be wholly disregarded. Being conceived as persons having all the faculties and passions of men, it was an easy step to bestow upon them a human body, and thus enable them to exist apart from the elements they ruled. The actions at first attributed to them would correspond closely with the powers manifested by the elements, but when they came to be thought of as persons alone, the material they were first conceived as animating being dropped, the imagination no longer restrained by being obliged to express real phenomena would run riot, and legends and myths innumerable would be invented to give a basis and scope for feelings ever ready to burst forth. Those who were not too much overcome by fear would take delight in the gods, and honour them by attributing to them the most beautiful form, as well as all the capacities of pleasure which they themselves enjoyed.

The belief in the existence of gods that never were presented to the senses becomes more intelli-

gible to us when we reflect on the strong passions which must have animated their worshippers in the presence of nature, and the necessity they felt to have living beings like themselves to facilitate the conception of nature, and to supply objects for the expression of their emotions. Though conceived as persons, they have a more exalted dignity and higher powers than were given to the human race; and their bodies, though regarded as truly material, were not subjected to the same limitations as those of men, but could freely pass from one position in space to another. The analogy of human action represented but imperfectly the phenomena of nature, and the gods must have been conceived as exercising a mysterious influence, unlike anything human, over the elements they ruled. The more man felt his helplessness amidst the powers of nature, the more exalted would be the notions he formed of the authority and dignity of the gods. But however superior they may be conceived to be to man, they are still regarded as parts of the great system of things. They are immortal, but not eternal; like men they are born in the world, and constitute a part of it. The idea of creation is a refinement of a more advanced knowledge, and there can be no doubt but that the separation of the gods from the elements with which they were at first identified and the ascription to them of a distinct personality prepared the way for the higher conception. Those who felt themselves

completely helpless amidst the powers of the external world would not assimilate the nature of the gods so closely to their own, but would ascribe to them monstrous forms, to which they would add everything that their fancy could suggest as capable of inspiring fear.

When the gods were closely assimilated to men and were believed to be born and reared, to marry and to become parents, it would not be extravagant to suppose that they were related to the human family. At any rate, if the gods which ruled over nature were not so related, it accorded with the condition of primitive civilization to believe that the progenitors of the human family, or of the tribes composing it, were gods or the descendants of gods. Their chiefs and kings were men who exercised a power over them as mysterious and as irresistible as that of the elements. The very same emotions were inspired by them as by the gods. As in infant societies the chief or king must necessarily be despotic, he would be regarded with fear, and fear is the most important element of early religious sentiment. A rude people would thus be induced to regard their chief as a divinity, and to offer religious homage to a god who did not differ essentially from themselves. When the chief died, the belief in his divinity was not given up, for he was supposed to have left for some other abode, most probably that of the gods, whence he continued to rule his people, either by occasional direct



interference, or simply through the agency of his successor.

As mankind advanced in civilization, they elevated to the rank of gods those who had benefited their country by the invention of useful arts. Moral qualities and even abstract conceptions were also deified, and thus a class of gods was established having no connexion with physical phenomena.

Thus was formed the Greek Pantheon, and from the preceding brief analysis of the circumstances and feelings which gave birth to it, we may readily conceive what were the opinions entertained of the providence of the gods or the relations they bore to the human family. So far as their actions were identified with the phenomena exhibited by the elements over which they ruled, so far would providence be natural. It would not, however, be natural in the sense in which the word is now understood, for at that time the distinction between the natural and the supernatural was but vaguely appreciated. All phenomena were regarded as actions, and were considered solely in relation to the will of the god who performed them, and not in connexion with their natural antecedents and consequents. They were natural inasmuch as the attention was first directed to them, and the conception of the divine agency was regulated by the observation of the external appearances. The objective tendency of the Greeks and the delight they took

in nature must have prevented them from supposing that the relations the gods bore to man were entirely arbitrary, as these relations had, to a certain extent at least, to be accommodated to observed facts.

The worship given to the gods, being coeval with the earliest religious conceptions, and continued into times when these conceptions were considerably modified, reveals to us the views entertained of the divine providence. Worship implies a sense of the greatness of its object, and this greatness would be measured by the human standard. Whatever transcended human power, whatever influenced man irresistibly from without, whatever thoughts gushed up spontaneously with unwonted vividness from within, would be ascribed to the gods. All occurrences, being considered actions, would be ascribed to the will of the gods, and this will they thought to influence through the same motives they brought to bear upon their fellow-men. Honour and praise were ascribed to them, offerings were made to secure their benevolent regard, and in utter helplessness man could but cry out to them for help. In these circumstances, to have doubted that the gods interfered with human affairs would have been equivalent to denying their existence; nay more, natural occurrences would have been totally unintelligible unless viewed as the actions of gods who were moved by good will or anger towards mankind. Provi-

dence was thus identified with natural phenomena viewed as the actions of beneficent or angry deities.

When the gods came to be conceived as existing apart from the elements they ruled, their relations to man were no longer confined to such as were suggested by the observation of natural occurrences. The gods were then believed to dwell together in some region not very remote, and to form a society the counterpart of that which existed on earth. Forsaking the material bodies they were supposed to animate, and assuming the human form, they assemble on Olympus or wander through the groves, and engage in human occupations and pleasures, losing all connexion with natural phenomena. They have a chief whose will is supreme though not unopposed. To others are assigned offices similar to those held amongst men. They are swayed by passion, wearied with toil, and subject to pain. When such purely imaginary views of the gods are entertained, it is evident that there must be great scope for difference of opinion as regards the part they are supposed to take in human affairs. Cicero, speaking of the variety of sentiments entertained on this subject, says: "The most considerable part of the dispute is, whether they are wholly inactive, totally unemployed, and free from all care and administration of affairs: or, on the contrary, whether all things were made and constituted by them from the beginning; and whether they will

continue to be actuated and governed by them to eternity.”\* Such speculative opinions could be propounded only after faith, in the national religion had begun to decline. To question the interference of the gods in human affairs is to disregard their worship and almost to deny their existence. Devout worship admits no element of doubt, nor even of inquiry. The primitive theology, modified more or less by poetic legends, would continue to be the basis of the popular worship long after the more intellectual classes began to speculate about the nature and employment of the gods. Philosophy arose when the national religion ceased to be an adequate expression of the opinion of the thinking class, and consequently began to lose its hold upon their faith. In order to learn the earliest views regarding the providence of the gods we must have recourse to the national religion as still accepted by the vulgar, and disregard the speculative interpretations put upon it by the philosophers.

The gods are represented as interested in the Trojan war, some taking one side and some another for no assignable reason. They even descend from Olympus to rescue their friends from danger, or to engage in personal conflict with man. Though temporarily placed on a footing with man, and even represented as wounded and screaming from pain, they were at the same time regarded as superior to him in dignity and power. Their favour

\* *De Natura Deorum.* Lib. I. 1.

was propitiated by sacrifices, which they were supposed to enjoy. Their aid was invoked when difficult enterprises were undertaken. They were believed to visit with great calamities those who neglected their worship. They were supposed to interpose to save men from danger, and votive tablets were hung up in their temples in grateful acknowledgment. The interest taken by the gods in human affairs was also evinced by divination, by means of which future events known only to them were revealed to men, who were thus enabled to regulate their conduct accordingly. In a more general way, they were regarded as ministering to human wants in the ordinary course of nature. The heavenly bodies, the returning seasons, the productive fields, domestic animals, and all objects and arrangements of nature of great utility, were evidence of the care the gods took of the human family.

Thus the gods, forming a society of themselves, and engaging in employments and pleasures having reference to themselves alone, were also interested in the human race, mingled with them in the combat, counselled them, aided them, and punished them. The gods were associated with all those events which interested man in consequence of their beneficial or hurtful influence. Events wholly indifferent to man called forth no religious emotions. When the gods were identified with natural phenomena, their disposition towards

man was founded on observation, their character being inferred from their actions ; when they were believed to form a society apart from nature, they were endowed with a moral character similar to that of their worshippers ; and those phenomena which were believed to proceed from the powerful emotions ascribed to them, were alone regarded as the actions of the gods. In the one case the objective prevailed over the subjective, in the other the subjective over the objective. In both cases, all that was commonplace and indifferent was disregarded, and all that arrested the attention and influenced human well-being was the work of the gods. The acts of the gods were not understood to have natural relations to each other, but were viewed solely with reference to the power of the gods themselves, and the feelings with which they were animated towards men. Beings capable of doing what so much exceeded human effort, would readily be conceived to possess unlimited power, and the more unusual and extraordinary an event was, it was the more evident to them that it proceeded from the gods. All the phenomena of nature were classed as the indifferent or commonplace, and the divine ; and as the latter included all that interested mankind, every act of the gods was a special providence.

The preceding remarks, though applying more particularly to the Grecian mythology, go far to explain the growth of all primitive religions. We

must however notice specially the religion of the Jews, not merely on account of the peculiarities it presents, but because many of their religious conceptions have descended to us through Christianity, and are generally maintained, more or less modified, at the present day.

The Jews are regarded as being remarkable for maintaining the idea of the divine unity, in the midst of polytheistic and idolatrous nations. It is difficult for us now to trace the precise manner in which this conception was developed out of the primitive beliefs of mankind. Even barbarous nations have entertained a vague notion of the existence of one great Spirit. When the gods are conceived as existing altogether apart from natural phenomena, the highest amongst them may attain a rank so much superior to that held by the others as to become not merely the supreme, but almost the sole, object of worship; or one of them may be regarded with special favour by a people while the worship of the others is neglected. The transition is easy from the conception of the highest to that of the absolute, and from the worship of one god to the belief in one god. The tendency of abstract thinking is towards a divine unity. In the history of the Aryans of Hindostan, we can trace the gradual evolution of the idea of the universal soul, and the consequent degradation of the primitive objects of their worship to the position of subordinate agents, ruling the elements and heavenly bodies. In this form of

monotheism, however, God is one because He is the All. In the monotheism of the Jews, on the contrary, God was conceived as one, and yet entirely separate from nature. It is impossible now to trace the origin of this belief among the Jews, and the opinion almost universally entertained that it was communicated to their leaders and prophets by special divine revelation supersedes all inquiry. It is very obvious that it was not the natural outgrowth of their intellectual and social condition, but was imposed upon them from without, and being alien to their habits of thought was for a long period very imperfectly apprehended, and retained but a slight hold upon their affections. But no religion could be imposed upon a people unless it possessed some dogmas and observances level to their capacities, and in harmony with their feelings. The religion taught to the Jews, when they were emerging from a state of barbarism, would have been wholly uninfluential had it not possessed some of the characteristics of the primitive faiths. The attempt to impose a religion involving highly spiritual and abstract conceptions upon a people capable of being moved chiefly by sensuous impressions would prove utterly futile; and the mass of the Jewish people acquired a pure monotheistic belief only after long training, and frequent relapses into the idolatry of surrounding nations. Their first conception of the Deity and of the service acceptable to him, fell far short of that



ultimately attained. It will be instructive, then, to inquire in what respect the Jewish religion resembled the primitive beliefs of mankind.

We have already mentioned the strong tendency amongst primitive races to ascribe super-human power to chiefs and kings, and to place them after their death among the gods, and it will be necessary again to refer to it a little more in detail. This disposition is naturally associated with the personification and worship of natural agencies. The nature-gods are the product of certain powerful emotions, which are equally excited by human rulers. The power exercised by a chief was as mysterious to his rude follower as that of the gods, and as effectually controlled his freedom of action. A power so greatly superior to his own was very readily believed to be unlimited, and the person who exercised it something very different from ordinary humanity. Being subject occasionally to the effects of this power, and not knowing to what extent it might at any time be exercised, (being dependent upon the caprice of an individual,) he would be inspired with wonder and fear; and a being believed to be possessed of unlimited power and regarded through these strong emotions, is a god. It is easy to conceive that, in certain conditions, the religious feelings might be more powerfully directed towards the ruler than to natural agencies. The nature-gods might thus come to be totally disregarded. The power of the

chief is manifested in order to establish his authority. His will must be submitted to on pain of incurring his displeasure and vengeance. When he dies, he merely removes to some other region, from which he still continues to rule through the agency of his successors, who enforce his commands, by the threat of his vengeance. He is thus raised still further above the level of humanity; and, though still essentially a ruler, men in their fear and ignorance ascribe to him unlimited power over the external world, which power he is supposed to exercise chiefly in enforcing his commands.

The God of the Jews was essentially a ruler. In their minds, civil government could not be dissociated from religious worship. Though the more intellectual and cultivated amongst them entertained very elevated ideas of God, and ascribed to Him infinite perfections, there can be no doubt that the great mass of the nation, especially in the earlier period of its history, regarded Him as a human being manifesting human passions and weaknesses, and possessed of a real bodily form. He was not merely a ruler, but the ruler of the Jews. He was viewed as a national god, just as each tribe in primitive times may have had its god, whose superiority over the gods of neighbouring tribes was its boast. The Jew delighted in glorifying his God, for in doing so he manifested his patriotism. His God was not the god of all mankind. The Jews acknowledged the existence

of other deities, but they believed in the pre-eminence of their national God. They accepted Him, because they believed that they were His chosen people, and that He was able to favour them, and to execute vengeance on their enemies. This is well illustrated in the contract which Jacob makes with God after his vision at Bethel—"If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God."\* Jacob accepts the God who will show him the most favour. The monotheism of the Jews was essentially different from that which is reached from philosophy. Their God was simply the "great King above all gods;" the most powerful of gods; and their national God; and, as he was of such superior importance to them, their minds were so absorbed in His worship that they came to regard Him as the *only* God, the existence of all others being for the time overlooked. Their intense nationality was thus inseparably connected with their monotheistic belief. Their government was a pure theocracy. Their leaders and judges were appointed by God and acted under His immediate direction. The will of God was revealed to the human agents who administered His government, by His appearing personally and speaking to them, by sending

\* Genesis xxviii. 20, 21.

angels as His messengers, or in some other less material and more mysterious manner; but in whatever way communicated it was the sole rule of conduct.

Besides the commands which were being constantly issued for the guidance of the Jews during the different periods of their history, they were supernaturally provided with a civil constitution, and a vast body of laws which regulated every detail of their conduct as regarded themselves and their relations to others and to the state, and which also specified the manner and time of conducting their ceremonial worship. This polity was imposed upon them by God, and was binding because it was His will. With them there was no distinction between moral and positive law. Their law contained what are now regarded as moral precepts, but these were to the Jews simply the commands of their divine Ruler, and were obligatory as such, and therefore differed in no respect from commands having no natural basis. Moral codes, civil laws and directions for religious observances, were confounded, and their differentiation was the product of a later period and a higher culture. The Jewish law is accommodated to a people occupying a peculiar position amongst the nations, and possessing many of the features characteristic of a rude and primitive race. It contains no reference whatever to the natural relations of things and the adaptation of conduct to these relations; and

all its precepts, whether sanitary, moral, civil, or ceremonial, are equally obligatory, having all the same origin and authority. The morality of the Jews from its very nature must have been imperfect. No set of moral laws, however faithfully obeyed or rigorously executed, can meet all the exigencies of life, or compensate for the want of that higher moral faculty which avails for every emergency.

We have now to consider the means by which obedience was enforced. The authority exercised by a ruler is based on his power to reward or punish ; and it is this power which appears in early times so mysterious and undefined as to excite the religious emotions, and lead to the deification of the ruler. The power to reward and punish constitutes the claim which the ruler possesses on the obedience of his subjects. Its exercise is the peculiar function of the ruler, and his activity is indissolubly associated with it. As the God of the Jews was essentially the ruler of their nation, His authority was sanctioned by the rewards and punishments He bestowed. The rewards consisted of those worldly blessings which they most highly esteemed, such as long life, victory over their enemies, plentiful harvests, increasing flocks and herds, and so on. The punishments, on the other hand, consisted of those evils they most dreaded, such as plague, famine, and the sword of their enemies. The forbearance of God was shown in refraining from punishing them when they were disobedient, and

His favour in relieving them when they applied to Him for aid. The fear of God was inculcated as the strongest motive to obedience. The rewards and punishments followed so closely upon the acts of obedience and disobedience that the Jews had no hesitation in ascribing them to their divine Ruler. The Jewish idea of God being, as we have said, essentially that of a ruler, his activity was chiefly manifested in rewarding and punishing; and consequently those natural events, which were regarded as rewards or punishments, would be looked upon as proceeding in a direct and exclusive manner from God. The providence of God is observed in those events which we ascribe more immediately to Him, and the events we select for this purpose are determined by the conception we have formed of the divine character. To the Jews, God was a ruler, and consequently the events specially attributed to Him were the temporal sanctions of His law. He was their ruler alone, and in this conception we have the key to the views they entertained regarding His providence. Being their God exclusively, they looked for the manifestation of His power in events having special reference to themselves. In such events alone did they feel any interest. The rest of nature had no religious significance, and was consequently little regarded. They took no delight in nature for its own sake. Its beauties did not attract them. Science could never have originated amongst such a people.

Only such events as were supposed to have a spiritual significance secured their attention or engaged their feelings. They did not reach the conception of God through external nature, but directly through humanity; and, having attained this conception, they interpreted nature in the light of their spiritual relations. The providence of God was not co-extensive with nature, but was special, because Jehovah was not the God of the rest of mankind in the same sense as He was their God. Nature had no reality in itself; it was a mere instrument in the hands of God, and consequently all interest was withdrawn from it and concentrated in the creator. It was impossible even for the Jew to confine his observation entirely to those events which had special reference to himself or his nation. There were phenomena of a general kind which forced themselves on his attention, but they had no interest to him on their own account. It was as illustrating in a general way the power and wisdom of Jehovah that they had any significance to him. They were additional proofs of the greatness of that God who had chosen the Jews to be His favoured people; and who overruled the course of nature, so as to make it minister specially to their necessities.

Those events which were specially related to the peculiar circumstances of the Jews, would be rare compared with those that were indifferent and equally related to all mankind, and hence the divine activity would be associated with what was

rare, and consequently wonderful. There being no limit to the divine power, the more wonderful an event was, the more likely was it to be ascribed to God. The dividing of the Red Sea was a very special act, for it occurred at the moment it was required, and formed the only way of escape which remained to the Israelites. It was also for their special benefit; and while it provided them a safe passage, it led to the discomfiture of their oppressors, and was therefore such an act as a national god might be expected to perform. It was also rare and wonderful, nothing similar having been before observed. For these reasons it was regarded as divine in a far higher sense than the returning season or the fruitful field. What is special interests us far more than what is general. The providing of manna in the wilderness for the Israelites, was to them a more god-like act than the clothing of the earth with a fertility which supplied the wants of all.

Thus was established the distinction between the general and the special, the common and the wonderful; and with the special and the wonderful alone were the religious emotions entwined. Regarding God as a ruler rewarding with blessings those who observed his law, and inflicting summary vengeance on the disobedient by direct interpositions, they would interpret the natural blessings and evils of life, in the light of those strong emotions which the exercise of unlimited



power is certain to produce in an ignorant and consciously guilty people. When natural events could not be so interpreted, there would be great readiness to believe in occurrences which satisfied the demands of their preconceived opinions. Some natural coincidences are so remarkable as to take a strong hold on the mind; but when these failed, the imagination, unrestrained by any knowledge of the necessary relations of all natural phenomena, would compensate for the inconsistency between the natural course of things and their religious views, and would supply occurrences in the belief of which their emotions would find ample expression.

What was for the special benefit of the Jews, was in consequence uncommon, and the idea of divine activity becoming thus associated with what was rare, the mere fact of rarity apart from all purpose would come to be regarded as evidence of the special interposition of their divine Ruler. Taking delight in their national God, and glorying in the manifestation of His power, there would arise a disposition to entertain the most extravagant and absurd beliefs, and a tendency to mistake those legends which merely embodied the feelings for narratives of real occurrences.

The Judaical views of the providence of God in the moral government of the world have had immense influence in moulding the opinions subsequently entertained on this subject; and have

great weight even in the present day, notwithstanding the progress of knowledge, and the wider sympathy and more frequent intercourse between people belonging to different nations. In the middle ages, in Western Europe, the religious feelings were associated with the Catholic Church. As among the Jews, God manifested Himself as the ruler and judge of His chosen people, in the laws and polity He had established, and the sanctions by which they were enforced; so in later times, His power was recognised in a new revelation of His will, in the establishment of a hierarchy, and in interposing by direct acts to advance that hierarchy and to favour those who belonged to it. The Jewish conception of providence was a providence in the interest of the Jewish nation; the middle age conception, a providence in the interest of the true believer. The divine providence was recognised only in those events which were believed to be direct interpositions, for the purpose of honouring and promoting the Catholic Church and the faithful belonging to its fold. The more special these interferences were, the more obviously were they designed to benefit the Church. Like the Jews, the Catholics observed the divine providence just where their beliefs, and their emotions guided by their beliefs, led them to look for it. The events which they were thus predisposed to regard as divine, they ascribed to the immediate operation of God; and did not concern themselves at all about

their natural antecedents or consequents. They were intelligible to them solely from the relation they were believed to bear to the Church ; and the difficulty which we have in conceiving events apart from their natural relations would not then present itself. To have felt this difficulty would have been equivalent to questioning the power of God, and the divine origin of the Church. The indulgence of the religious emotions in connexion with the belief that the divine providence was manifested through the Church alone, in an age in which there was no faith in positive knowledge, led to a credulity which it was impossible to satisfy. Not only were natural events, which were susceptible of an interpretation in harmony with their beliefs and emotions, attributed in a peculiar sense to God, but the most extravagant and even ridiculous stories were narrated and believed. The imagination, stimulated by powerful emotions and unrestrained by any acquaintance with natural laws, revelled in the production of the most preposterous wonders which, as they formed a channel for the flow of their feelings, were readily accepted as real narratives by the unsuspecting faith of the ignorant. The providence of God, or what is accepted as evidence of His manifestation to man, thus continued to be identified with what were believed to be direct interpositions, expressive of certain preconceived views of the divine character ; and the belief in these direct interpositions led,

under the influence of feeling and imagination, to their indefinite multiplication, irrespective altogether of actual observation.

As illustrations of these remarks, we may refer more particularly to some of the beliefs entertained by the Catholic Church. Among the Jews, the government of God was believed to be direct and continuous. His will was made known to them through their leaders and prophets; and rewards and punishments were bestowed by direct interposition as occasion demanded. So also the Catholic Church is believed to be under the continuous superintendence and direction of God, and thus derives an authority which it is impious to resist. It claims belief for its doctrines, not merely because they can be proved to be of divine origin, but because they are sanctioned by an infallible Church. Not only did the Church possess immunity from error in consequence of the immanence of the Deity in it, but its temporal prosperity was secured by the divine interference. God overruled nature in the interest of the Church. The ordinary course of things was interrupted whenever the exigencies of the Church required it. Miracles were so common that they excited no astonishment. It was not to be supposed that natural events would be allowed to obstruct the prosperity of an institution founded and favoured by God himself. Nature and history were interpreted in the light of the Church and its dogmas. When physical and his-

torical events accorded with preconceived opinions, no further explanation of them was required. In the complicacy and apparent fortuity of most natural phenomena, such coincidences would not be difficult to find ; when they could not be found, it was easy to imagine them. Natural causes were not held in much estimation. When unknown, ignorance of them was not felt to be any evil ; when known, they did not satisfy, and what was deemed a higher explanation was demanded. This the dogmas were supposed to afford. Every event was considered from a theological point of view. If a disease were cured, the favour of a saint who had been propitiated was a sufficient explanation. If prosperity attended an individual or a nation, it was attributed to some service rendered to the Church. Some terrible disaster was sure to happen, sooner or later, to those who injured it. Natural causes might account for such supposed interferences, but there was no disposition to search for them, and no confidence placed in them when they could not be ignored. People wished to establish connexions between events in accordance with their dogmas ; and when they succeeded in doing so, by selecting cases which seemed to verify their preconceptions, were content to leave all else unexplained, and to disregard all those instances which would lead to a contrary result. They found in nature what they looked for ; all else was indifferent to them. It may readily be conceived

to what gross superstition, fanaticism, and credulity this mode of thinking must have led in an age in which knowledge had made but little progress. Miracles were so common as to excite little wonder. The most extraordinary virtues were believed to be conferred on everything associated in their minds with religion ; such as men of peculiar sanctity, relics of saints and martyrs, and the scenes of sacred events. At one period the sole literature consisted of legends of the saints. So great was the general credulity that even professedly historical works were little better than collections of the most extravagant and ridiculous stories. As the authority of the Church rested on the basis of direct divine interposition and guidance, it was the interest of the clergy to encourage the general credulity ; and when they could no longer suppress inquiry, they laboured to subordinate even scientific inductions to dogmas which had no other authority than the alleged infallibility of the Church.

The Deity, it was believed, might be moved by the intercession of the Virgin, and the Virgin by the entreaties and devotion of her votaries ; and thus by direct interference an impending evil might be averted and deliverance brought to the suffering and afflicted. The Virgin was thus believed to be the dispenser of all temporal and spiritual good. Those who were relieved after appealing to her for deliverance had their faith in her interces-

sion confirmed ; their hearts overflowed with gratitude which found a tangible expression in offerings at the altar ; while those who were not rewarded with a like success did not doubt her power, but attributed their failure to their own unworthiness. It was only when placed in circumstances in which they felt their own inability to help themselves, or when the natural means of effecting their purpose were obscure, uncertain, or distasteful, that people had recourse to immediate divine interposition. In the ordinary events of life, in which a limited amount of knowledge is sufficient to enable one to predict with some degree of probability the course of nature, the ordinary dictates of prudence were trusted and acted upon, and to this extent natural causes were recognised ; but when the future was regarded as contingent, and when the emotions were powerfully called forth, a supernatural agency was evoked which, it was confidently believed, would be exerted for the true believer who appealed to the Virgin for help.

The good or evil which a man suffered was regarded as sent immediately by God to reward devotion, or to punish indifference or opposition to the Church, without any reference to the natural causes which produce them. The belief of the Jews in the immediate and temporal character of rewards and punishments was retained, though modified by the doctrine of the immortality of the soul,—a doctrine unknown to the Jews, at least to

the great mass of the people, and never enforced as a ground of obedience. The good were rewarded, and the wicked punished by God in this life; but it was also observed that good and evil were unequally distributed. The wicked were sometimes prosperous, and the good exposed to loss and persecution; but the imperfections of this world would, it was believed, be compensated, and the justice of God vindicated, by the final awards of the future life. The power to dispense the mysterious enjoyments and sufferings of that state was believed to have been committed to the Church, and tended greatly to aggrandize its influence in an ignorant and credulous age.

Cities and nations, as well as individuals, had their protecting saints, to whom they looked for deliverance and prosperity, apart altogether from natural conditions. If a town or district escaped a pestilence which ravaged the neighbourhood, it was due to the favour of a patron saint, or the possession of a holy relic. An inundation, or failure of crop, or any other public calamity, was attributed to desecration of the sabbath, toleration of some offensive opinion, or whatever cause the party pronouncing the judgment thought proper to condemn. The Virgin was believed not only to rescue her votaries, but to present herself in a visible form for the purpose. It is obvious that this mode of thinking must have tended to confound all moral truth, and to induce the belief



that the successful must be in the right. Success was appealed to as evidence of the divine favour. It could not be denied that success was not invariably on the side of the Church, and that her enemies sometimes triumphed. The good effect of this observation was destroyed by the interpretation put upon it. The success of their enemies was believed to be a snare to bring about some greater disaster, and the humiliation of the Church was no doubt due to the divine displeasure, incurred in consequence of some neglect or remissness in worship, and to be averted by renewed devotion.

With the belief in the power of the saints was combined a belief in the evil agency of the Devil, who was permitted to oppose what was good, and to tempt and afflict the faithful. The obstacles to the truth were as little natural as the influences which favoured it. They were the immediate actions of evil powers, warring against the good. The existence of wonders in connexion with other religions was not denied, but they were attributed to Satanic agency. The Church was not divine because of its miracles,—other religions being able to boast of even greater wonders, the reality of which was never questioned; but because it was the sole depository of the truth, and medium of divine communication; and being such, the wonders wrought in its favour were necessarily from God, and all others from the spirit of evil.

The Catholic Church claimed authority in matters of belief, because it was a divine institution, infallibly directed by the inspiration of God. At, and previous to, the time of the Reformation, various causes concurred to stimulate a spirit of inquiry ; and the authority exercised by the Church was felt to be an intolerable yoke. It was an authority exercised by men who were no better informed or better behaved than their neighbours. Though alleged to be founded on the divine guidance, it was obvious that a human element mingled largely in it. The views of the Church on physical subjects were found to be opposed to scientific inductions. Its religious dogmas were deemed inconsistent with the written word. The divine will, as revealed in nature, in the Bible, and in the Church, could not be contradictory ; and it could not remain long doubtful which of them must give way. It was difficult to believe that an institution which had become so degenerate could be the only recipient of inspiration. The growing dissatisfaction with the Church took the form of Protestantism. The Protestants also recognised an infallible authority, though not in the Church supernaturally directed, but in the text of Scripture. They refused to submit blindly to the authority of an existing institution, but they accepted, as an infallible rule of faith, the writings of men who lived many centuries ago, and to whom they believed inspiration had been restricted. In what respect

then, it will be asked, did the Protestants enjoy more freedom of judgment than the Catholics? Submission to a body of men with whose general conduct they were familiar, was a more intolerable yoke than submission to the authority of men long dead. It was less difficult to believe that God had inspired, and infallibly guided, the holy men who wrote the Scriptures, than that He inspired a Church which they did not believe to be free from error. Besides, they were at liberty to examine the evidences by which the Bible was authenticated as a divine revelation, and having assured themselves of their validity, they were entitled to interpret it each according to his own method.

The Protestants announced no essentially new view of the divine providence. They believed in the infallibility of the Scriptures alone, and that on the very same grounds as the Catholics believed in the infallibility of the Church,—viz. their divine origin, and the direct interpositions by which this was attested. As the Church was believed to be preserved from error by the continuous indwelling of God, so the Bible was believed to be watched over by a special providence and transmitted to our times free from textual error. The world was believed to be governed supernaturally in the interest of Christianity; but a Christian was not a member of a particular ecclesiastical corporation;—he was a believer in the divine record. The Protestants did not doubt the interference of spiritual beings in

mundane affairs. They rejected the popish miracles, because they disbelieved the popish doctrines. They could not believe that God would interfere for the sake of those who erred in the faith. They therefore discredited all the miracles appropriated by the Church of Rome, and adhered to those which were wrought in attestation of the Scriptures, when they were first promulgated. There was no indisposition amongst Protestants to disbelieve in spiritual interferences; and it is remarkable that a belief in Satanic agency longest survived the period of general credulity. Luther believed in the Devil, not as a mystic conception, but after a most intensely realistic manner. He contended with him as he would with a personal enemy. The belief in witchcraft continued long after the time of the Reformation. During periods of persecution, when the religious feelings are strongly moved, there was a ready disposition to believe that those who fought against the people of God were aided and protected by Satanic power. During the prevalence of what are called revivals of religion, we observe the same tendency to supernaturalism. The bodily manifestations which accompany intense mental excitement are ascribed to direct interposition, and the more ignorant believe that marks are miraculously imprinted on the breast, and that the power of seeing with the eyes bandaged, and of predicting future events, is in some cases supernaturally conferred. A corre-

spondent of the "Times" stated that he saw evidence, in the recent Irish revivals, of the agency of infra-natural, as well as supernatural power.

The tendency to discredit modern miracles did not proceed from Protestantism, but from causes that were coeval with its rise. These causes were strong enough to confine the disposition to believe in the marvellous within very narrow limits. When two religious bodies, each of which can boast of supernatural powers, are opposed to each other, the one ascribes the miracles of the other to demoniacal influence, when it cannot dispute the fact of their occurrence. The Protestants however having, in consequence of the progress of knowledge and civilization, some difficulty in establishing a claim to supernatural gifts, were disposed to discredit the Catholic miracles altogether rather than ascribe them to Satanic agency; and perceiving that the evidence on which the Catholic miracles rested was as strong as the evidence for their own, they felt there was some danger in admitting modern miracles at all. So far as supernaturalism is concerned, the tendency of Protestantism is simply negative. It retained the belief in inspiration, but restricted it to certain remote periods, and to a few individuals who flourished in them. It did not throw aside the belief in miracles, but discredited modern miracles, and accepted only those that attested the true religion when it was first promulgated. It retained the belief in divine

interference, but restricted it to rare and important occasions. "It is the practice, we believe, with the orthodox, both in the Scotch and the English Churches, to insist very rarely and very discreetly upon the particular instances of the interference of Divine Providence. They do not contend that the world is governed only by general laws—that a Superintending Mind never interferes for particular purposes, but such purposes are represented to be of a nature very awful and sublime, —when a guilty people are to be destroyed—when an oppressed nation is to be lifted up, and some remarkable change introduced into the order and arrangement of the world." \*

The conception of direct interference is the essential idea implied in providence, and is common to all religions; the tendency of Protestantism being to divest it of its more palpable supernaturalism. An event which is regarded as providential is considered in relation to God alone, apart from all relation to natural antecedents and consequents. All events are not alike providential. God is conceived as a power *above* nature, capable of superseding or altering the established order of things, and not as an Infinite Intelligence manifested *in* nature. Interference then is the only proof we can have of the divine activity, and indeed of the existence of God at all; for a god inactive is no

\* Sydney Smith's "Methodism."

god to us. Having this conception, we look for instances of interposition, and find what we expect. It is admitted that, in a general sense, all events are alike ordered by God;—the term of our life is fixed by Him—we die because our time is come. There is a general providence displayed in the beneficent adaptations of nature, and in the laws which express the order which inductive science has revealed; but this has a very different signification to the religious mind from that of the special providence in which God more directly manifests Himself to mankind.

It is believed that this special providence, though it implies direct interposition, may nevertheless be exercised without any *sensible* miracle. God may interfere, without the interference being recognised, as a marked departure from the wonted order of nature. The events which are regarded as more specially providential are therefore not necessarily marvellous, but are such as we might expect to proceed from God, in accordance with the views we entertain of His character and relations to mankind. To the Jews, God was a civil ruler, who took vengeance on those who disobeyed Him; and accordingly every event which seemed to them retributive was regarded as a peculiarly divine act. If it was at the same time uncommon, or calculated to inspire dread, it expressed the power of God as well as His disposition; but it was not providential because of its rarity alone, but because it accorded

with the conception the Jews entertained of the divine character. We have a more elevated conception of God, and select a wider range of events, and ascribe them to Him as His special acts, because they are such as answer to our conception of His character.

So strong is the indisposition at the present day to credit miracles, that it is believed by some that divine interposition not only does not necessarily imply sensible miracle, but may even take place without any violation of natural law whatever. God may interfere by using natural causes as instruments to effect His purposes. This view has evidently been imposed upon the religious conception of providence by the progress of science, and is but little accordant with its spirit. When certain events are selected and accounted providential, there must ever be a strong tendency to believe that the course of nature would have been different, had these special acts not been performed; and consequently that divine interposition is effected by a power which suspends or supersedes natural causes. Accordingly we find this belief in the insensible violation of natural laws even amongst those who discredit all miracles, except those narrated in Scripture. It is supposed to take place when the causes are so numerous or variable as to be incapable of exact observation, and when the results of their concurrence cannot be predicted; or amongst events the causes of which are un-



known. As the special activities of God must be the best evidence of His existence, there is a disposition to believe in creations, collocations, and catastrophes. But it is in mental and social phenomena, which have only recently been considered susceptible of inductive investigation, that we find the greatest scope for belief in special providence. Evil in the world is now regarded rather as a thing permitted by God than as the work of the devil, but this infernal agent is still believed to influence the mind by suggesting evil thoughts, and withdrawing the affections from what is good. God is believed to exert a spiritual influence, apart from all natural means of culture, to the extent of regenerating the soul and imparting to it a heaven-born knowledge and divine aspirations. The lives of individuals and the history of nations afford ample field for the belief in special divine interposition, without any sensible violation of the natural course of events. The ancient theological belief still prevails, but takes refuge amongst phenomena due to the operation of complex and variably concurring causes, where alone it is felt to be safe from the inductive spirit of the age.

## CHAPTER II.

### NATURALISM AND SUPERNATURALISM.

CULTURE restrains the emotions, but developes the intellect. In the infancy of the human race, the emotions would be more indulged and less controlled than in later ages ; while the intellect, having acquired as yet few generalizations, would be repressed by the vast variety and apparent irregularity of the phenomena pressing themselves on its attention. This condition of things would necessarily give rise to a method of interpreting nature wholly unsuited to a more advanced state of knowledge. All emotions, and especially vehement emotions, lead to impersonation. This is the case whether we conceive mind as influencing the external world, or as influenced by it. Emotion induces action ; and when circumstances prevent this, the mind does not rest satisfied, but calls upon inanimate objects to execute its will. When one under the influence of revenge is unable to reach the individual who has injured him, he invokes the lightning, the tempest, or some other natural

agent to do what he himself is powerless to effect. The mind also in its emotional state demands sympathy ; and if denied human sympathy, it appeals to surrounding nature, and inspires it with the same passion. But objects which obey the behests of emotion, or which are believed to be filled with kindred feeling, can only be conceived, at least as long as the mind is under the influence of the emotion, as personal agents. The objects themselves must be regarded as having some resemblance to human agents, whilst we conceive them as acting and feeling like them. We animate them with our own emotions, and then conceive them as possessing them independently. We do not perceive them as they present themselves to our intellectual apprehension alone. Their intellectual representation is transformed under the influence of the emotions ; and accordingly nature must exhibit a very different aspect to the mind habitually agitated by strong passions, from what it does to the mind disposed to view it intellectually.

Natural objects have themselves the power of engaging the feelings. They may inspire us with wonder, love, or fear, according as they are rare, beneficial, or hurtful. We cannot conceive them to be so related to us, without supposing them to be possessed of corresponding emotions. What is beneficial must be inspired with love, what is hurtful with anger ; and if we conceive them as mani-

festing love and anger, we must regard them as persons. They must resemble ourselves, for we possess these passions ; and we infer their presence when we perceive a corresponding outward manifestation.

That natural objects should exhibit human emotions, without possessing a visible bodily form, was no difficulty in an age which was credulous in consequence of the very limited extent of its knowledge. The bodily form was supplied by the imagination, and being conceived to satisfy the demands of the emotions, it was as firmly believed in as if it had been actually perceived by the senses. When we reflect that emotion has the power of transforming the aspects which nature presents to the purely intellectual gaze, and of harmonizing them with itself, and that what the imagination adds to the cold intellectual perception is believed to have a real objective existence, we need not wonder that the primitive races, whose imaginations were not restrained by any clearly defined perception of the incompatibility of the emotional and intellectual representation of nature, ascribed supernatural attributes to natural objects, and peopled the world with deities.

The personification of natural agencies, while satisfying the demands of the emotions, unconsciously afforded an explanation of natural phenomena,—perhaps the only explanation which could then be entertained. When man first opened his

eyes upon the world, and had his attention arrested by those great and marvellous appearances which surrounded him, nature would be an enigma, until he formed some hypothesis that would make it intelligible to him. A phenomenon must be conceived as related to something else before it can take a place within the sphere of our knowledge, otherwise it is only a passing sensation. What is this sun, whose light and heat daily reanimate the world; what the wind; the rain; the thunder; the flowing river; and the fertile field? The one does not explain the other, and yet the mind must have some explanation; it will not rest satisfied with them as mere sensations. But the feelings have already personified them, and the phenomena they present are regarded as acts, and thus become intelligible. The activity most familiar to man is his own activity; the effects most familiar to him are the effects of his own actions. He hastily assumes his activity to be the type of all activity, thus explaining the unfamiliar by the most familiar. This assumption that all action is similar to his own is used to interpret phenomena, just as some mystical theories, invented in much later times, were employed to colligate and explain the few and imperfect facts then known. The explanation which this hastily assumed generalization afforded was sufficient in the then undeveloped state of knowledge; none other was sought, and none other could have been un-

derstood. Take as an example the Scandinavian explanation of thunder. "Thunder was not then mere electricity, vitreous, or resinous; it was the god Donner (Thunder) or Thor,—god also of beneficent summer-heat. The thunder was his wrath, the gathering of the black clouds is the drawing down of Thor's angry brows; the fire-bolt bursting out of heaven is the all-rending hammer flung from the hand of Thor; he urges his loud chariot over the mountain tops,—that is the peal; wrathful he blows in his red beard,—that is the rustling storm-blast before the thunder begins."\* The Ayrian view is slightly different. Instead of expressing the wrath of a deity, the thunder-storm is conceived to be a combat between the beneficent Indra and the demon Vritra. The earth-shaking Vritra withholds the fertilizing rains, but is attacked by Indra, "who comes loud shouting in his car, and hurls his thunder-bolt at the demon Vritra. . . . He strikes off the head of the earth-shaking Vritra with his rain-causing hundred-spiked bolt." This is no mere allegorical description of a thunder-storm, such as a modern poet might give. These gods were as real as the phenomena which were interpreted as their acts. To have propounded any other explanation of the thunder-storm would have been to doubt the power, or even the existence of the gods, and would, in consequence, have been opposed to the reverential

\* Carlyle's Lectures on Heroes.

feelings of their worshippers. But it would never occur to any one to seek for a different explanation ; for this mythological interpretation of nature not only gratified their religious feelings, but also satisfied their intellect. It was an hypothesis that made nature intelligible to them, and corresponded, in an age which was satisfied with vague analogies, to the more rigorous and abstract theories of modern times. We could conceive them accepting one mode of interpreting an occurrence in preference to another, because it was more in keeping with the character ascribed to a deity, or more analogous to human methods of working ; but an explanation which did not imply the idea of divine action, if it were ever given, would be dismissed at once as repugnant to their habitual mode of thinking.

Though all phenomena were viewed as acts, they differed greatly as regards the closeness of their analogy to human acts. The gods were believed to be capable of effecting whatever they wished ; so that although they were conceived as acting after the manner of men, there was more or less of mystery connected with their doings, which was fully accounted for by their superhuman power. The analogy of human action was employed so far as it appeared applicable to aid the conception of the divine act. Indra hurls his thunder-bolt at the demon as the warrior throws his spear. The plague appears amongst the Greeks

engaged in the Trojan war, and it is Apollo who has sent it. Man can slay by the bow and arrow, and this analogy is employed to aid the conception of the act of the god. Apollo sends forth arrows from his quiver, and they produce, not wounds, but plague. No doctrine of contagion could be understood by those who thus interpreted natural occurrences. When human actions did not afford even an imperfect analogy, it was held to be a sufficient explanation of an occurrence, that the gods willed it; and what the gods wished they could effect. Thus all events were acts; whether they could be conceived after the manner of human acts or not.

There can be no progress in knowledge without hypothesis. We must first form some theory which will satisfy the more obvious conditions required; and this we may afterwards modify to accommodate it to the new facts observed; but inquiry can only be successfully prosecuted under the shelter of some hypothesis, even though an erroneous one. Thus we find that under the theological conception of nature, some progress was made in natural classification, and the foundation was laid upon which the superstructure of science was raised. Certain phenomena were classed together, which were supposed to be ruled by the same deity. Their classification was facilitated by the conception of a personal god, whose power was manifested in each. The generalization of the



gods and the classification of natural agencies proceeded together. The power of forming abstract ideas is only acquired after some considerable progress has been made in classification. Early languages abound in metaphor, but are deficient in words expressing abstract conceptions. It is difficult to train the mind to dwell on the attributes common to a class, without occupying itself too much with the individuals composing the class. This difficulty is overcome by conceiving the common quality as a deity, whose nature it is to act after a particular manner, and who thus manifests himself in each. This deity is conceived as a being possessed of a bodily form, similar to that of man, and is consequently an idea readily entertained. The mind was thus relieved from the necessity of forming an abstract conception of the common qualities contrary to its accustomed mode of thinking, and at the same time it was enabled to classify objects by connecting each individual with the concrete idea of a divinity. The advantage of this mythological way of thinking is seen more particularly in moral phenomena, and such abstract ideas as wisdom, virtue, and justice would not have been at least so soon attained, if attained at all, had they not been originally conceived as divinities.

We have seen that the emotions give rise to the mythical mode of interpreting nature, and that the knowledge of natural occurrences is at

first acquired under the belief that they are the direct acts of the gods. There is however a large class of events, observed even from the earliest times, which do not engage the emotions, and to which accordingly the above remarks do not apply. Innumerable sensations from the surrounding world are being constantly received, and were there not certain causes which direct the attention to some of them in preference to others, knowledge would be completely unattainable. The mind selects a limited number, and confines its attention to it, to the neglect of all others. Those sensations which it perceives to be associated in nature are associated in idea. The belief that they will be found always associated in fact as well as in idea constitutes knowledge.

Of all the causes that determine the selection of particular impressions, the emotions must have been the chief; but the necessity of supplying the bodily wants would be the most constant and imperative. It was necessary to know the qualities of various objects, and many of the natural relations of succession, in order to provide food and clothing; to construct implements for hunting or for war, and to practise the many arts that are known even to a rude civilization. The mere love of novelty would lead to the observation of those phenomena which were within reach and which gratified the mind by the shock of surprise they produced; but the desire for knowledge would

be strengthened and directed by the sense of its utility. In this way a great amount of knowledge is acquired, before it comes to be pursued for its own sake, and before the rigorous methods of science are employed to correct and extend it. The common knowledge which is accumulated to meet the demands of ordinary life does not differ essentially from scientific knowledge, which may be correctly described as an outgrowth or higher development. It is confined however to the more obvious and simple instances of the relations of co-existence and sequence. Those natural phenomena which have a uniform or periodical character must have been early observed; though the conditions on which their uniformity and periodicity depend would be unknown. The knowledge of the relations of sequence would be confined to those occurrences in which the cause is equally apparent to the senses as the effect, and in which the sequence was little liable to be interrupted or modified by the interference of other causes. Certain phenomena which were observed to be accompanied by others, were associated in the mind, so that when the one appeared the other was expected. The one brought up the other by the law of association of ideas, and no other connexion founded on a general proposition could at this time have been entertained. A very few observations of association in nature sufficed to establish the mental association, and when once formed,

there was a strong disposition apart from further experience to believe that the natural association would be permanent. As the expectation of the permanency of such associations was founded on a very limited experience, the generalizations thus hastily assumed would frequently fail to be substantiated by a more extended observation. This failure would not shake confidence in those generalizations which had hitherto been found to correspond with experience however limited, and which would be the more firmly adhered to that the others had to be resigned.

The disposition to believe that phenomena once observed coexisting, or following one another, would be found in future in the same relations, was not founded on any perception of a higher law which bound them; inasmuch as the knowledge of such a law is only possible when scientific methods are applied to the investigation of nature. No generalizations of a higher order than the class we have referred to had as yet been attained. The rude classifications of natural objects, formed in accordance with some single prevailing idea, afford but little ground for the discovery of general truths. The expectation of uniformity was founded on a narrow experience, and in conformity with a natural mental disposition. The expectation of the recurrence of associated phenomena being founded simply on their association in idea, no violence was done to the reason when the expecta-

tion was not fulfilled. Facts are observed in nature associated, but we do not know why they are so associated, until some general principle is discovered from which their association is inferred. We cannot then conceive them otherwise than associated in this manner without accepting a contradiction, or resigning the general principle.

The knowledge of the more obvious uniformities of nature is acquired in obedience to the practical demands of life. Man could not exist without some knowledge of the properties of matter. Knowledge is unconsciously acquired when the mind is merely seeking enjoyment from the surprise which novel effects produce, but it is also attributed to the stimulus of necessity; and the empirical knowledge attained by common observation is sufficient to secure considerable progress in art, which in time gives rise to science. The properties of bodies are observed in order to effect some end, and when there is no immediate end in view, there is nevertheless reference to some possible requirement. This method of viewing wants is essentially different from that previously considered,—namely, as the acts of some divine power. The attention was directed to them from a sense of the utility of being acquainted with them. The disposition was generated of considering events in relation to the conditions under which they appear, and experience was found in innumerable instances to confirm the natural tend-

ency to believe that phenomena once observed associated would be found ever afterwards in the same relation to each other. Though there did not exist as yet any conception of the reason why events were associated; and though uniformity was not believed to extend beyond that class of events in which it lay open to observation, it was perceived that there was an ordinary course of events, the evolution of which might be trusted to in the practical business of life. On the contrary, those events which were recognised as the acts of the gods arrested the attention on account of the emotions which they excited in the human breast. If beneficial or hurtful, they were attributed to the love or anger of the divinity. The act was considered not in its relations to antecedents or consequents, but solely in connexion with the motive which dictated it. It was a manifestation of the will of the deity. It was not thought of as, and indeed was not known to be, part of a uniform course or system to which it had fixed relations, but was regarded as perfectly isolated and arbitrary. Expressing the intentions of the deity at some given time and in peculiar circumstances, it might never recur.

There were thus two distinct classes of events, the ordinary and the extraordinary. This distinction was founded on differences in the events themselves, which led to their being interpreted differently. Ordinary events were uniform, daily

observed and daily relied on in the business of life. Extraordinary events were such as seemed to have no fixed relations, and consequently could not be predicted. As whatever we are accustomed to is apt to be regarded with indifference, the uniformities of nature with which we are familiar excite in us but little emotion, and are attended to solely in consequence of the use to which the knowledge of them may be applied. They come to be regarded as matters of course, and there is no disposition to connect them with divine agency. Those events on the contrary which, in the infancy of knowledge, appear to have no necessary relation to antecedents or consequents, engage the emotions, and are consequently regarded as acts of the gods. The one method of interpreting nature is not as yet felt to be incompatible with the other. The gods may perform acts when they have some moral end in view ; but there are many events that have no peculiar moral interest, and with which it was quite natural to suppose the gods had no concern. It was not necessary to the conception then entertained of the nature of the gods that all events alike should be represented as their acts.

This distinction was more or less defined according to the objective or subjective character of the prevailing mode of thinking. The tendency of the objective mind being to recognise divinity only so far as it manifests itself through observed

phenomena, great attention was given to nature ; and the attributes assigned to the gods were determined by the facts which they were assumed to explain. On the other hand, the tendency of the subjective mode of thinking was to separate the gods from the phenomena over which they were supposed to preside and to direct the attention to them alone, they being conceived as more or less idealized forms of humanity. The gods, though superhuman, were simply reflections of their worshippers, who recognised, as divine actions, those events only which were in keeping with the character assigned them. The objective mind took delight in the contemplation of nature and ascended to the supernatural through the natural. It was therefore but little disposed to connect the divine agency with one class of events in preference to another. The subjective mind took delight in the spiritual, to which the natural was deemed wholly subordinate. It viewed nature in its spiritual aspect alone, and no event had any significance to it that did not express some spiritual relation. Only a limited number of events could be so interpreted ; all others were destitute of interest and entirely dissociated from any idea of divine agency. As the one mode of thinking is never exhibited to the entire exclusion of the other, there will be found to be less difference than might on first consideration have been expected between those amongst whom the one or the other mode of



thinking prevailed as regards the views they entertained on the distinction between natural and supernatural events.

When there was a tendency to the subjective mode of thinking, and when the gods were supposed to act from certain prevailing emotions towards mankind, there was a strong disposition to believe that in circumstances which were fitted to call forth these emotions, the gods would act in accordance with them, even though such actions were opposed to the natural course of events. The expectation that the gods would act after such and such a manner would cause a ready credence to be given to all reports that they had so acted, especially when the actions were such as excited the emotions of wonder or fear; and when there is great credulity there is no lack of material to gratify it. That the gods should interfere with the ordinary course of things was in no way inconsistent with the conception then entertained of the nature of the uniformities which constitute it. Certain phenomena were seen together and were associated in the mind, so that the one immediately recalled the other; but the relation was not a necessary one, and could be conceived to be interrupted without implying any contradiction: and indeed a more extended experience had in many cases shown that the permanency of many such relations had been too hastily assumed.

If the belief in interferences involved no con-

traditions, it was also in keeping with the conception of a divine agent. The gods were conceived to be persons, but were believed to possess superhuman power. Man might wish the ordinary sequence of events interrupted when it interfered with his purposes, but he wants the power to accomplish his wish. He can operate on the surrounding world through his bodily powers under the direction of an intelligent will, but these powers are limited. But the gods are all-powerful,—whatever they wish they can bring about. Though every degree of resistance is alike overborne by the will of the gods, so that we can hardly speak of them as exerting any effort at all, yet power essentially implies effort and resistance; and an agent is a person who exerts power. When the gods act, it is implied that they have some resistance to overcome; and this resistance can only be the tendency in events to follow a uniform course. Before the gods could be conceived as exercising supernatural power, there must have been some perception of the ordinary course of things which that power was supposed to control. The Jews could not have distinguished from other events those wonderful deliverances which they without any hesitation ascribed to the direct operation of Jehovah, unless they had had some acquaintance with the natural or uniform course of things.

That the natural sequence of events should be interrupted by the divine power accorded both

with the views entertained of the nature of this sequence, and of the gods themselves. Any departure from the wonted order thus bore testimony to the divine interference, from the simple fact of its being an interruption of the natural course of things, apart altogether from any bearing it might have on the character ascribed to the gods. Every apparently exceptional occurrence would therefore be regarded as a supernatural act, especially if it were such as the gods were expected to perform. Events deemed exceptional appeal more strongly to the feelings than others. They arrest attention by the mere fact of their being opposed to the ordinary course of things. Being rare and manifesting power to which there is no limit, they are eminently fitted to excite wonder and awe. To see the most firmly trusted associations fail is more wonderful than to observe an unusual event which does not necessarily imply any suspension of the known uniformities. The more extraordinary the event, the greater must have been the power required to bring it about. Hence men extolled the gods by ascribing to them wonderful deeds. Wonder tends to induce worship. The Mexicans, previous to the Spanish invasion, were unacquainted with horses; and so much were they affected with wonder, that they worshipped even the dead bodies of those which came into their possession. All wonderful phenomena are believed to be due to supernatural power, simply because they are

wonderful. Hence all sacred writings abound in prodigies, and religion becomes almost identified with belief in the miraculous.

We have endeavoured to show, that even before science sprang from common knowledge, a distinction was made between those events which were observed to have uniform relations and those which have no obvious connexions; and that the latter alone were interpreted as divine acts. The discoveries of science tend to confirm and to extend the knowledge of invariable relations. When more vigorous methods of comparison were invented, many of the uniformities which had hitherto been but vaguely ascertained were found to be perfect. Mathematics arose out of common knowledge; and science can scarcely be said to have existed until results were subjected to exact measurement. The equality of relations under the same conditions thus rigorously ascertained could not fail to impress the mind with the definite and invariable connexion of things. To be able to predict not merely the kind of phenomenon that might be expected in certain circumstances, but also the exact quantities, and precise periods involved, afforded the strongest possible support to that natural disposition to believe in the persistence of observed relations beyond the bounds of our limited experience. The ability to measure results also demonstrated that the variations which were observed in many

of the ordinary uniformities were due, not to any change in the relations of things, but to changes in the conditions under which these uniformities were manifested. Besides, the uniformities of common observation are such as take place in phenomena which are easily recognized by the senses, and which are not liable to much interference; but science establishes the existence of uniform relations between phenomena which are less accessible, and even not immediately cognizable by the senses, and which may be masked by frequent interferences, owing to the complexity of the relations.

The tendency of the progress of science was to restrict the class of events which are associated with direct divine agency. So strong however is the disposition to believe in supernatural agents, that science itself was not exempt from its influence. Astronomy was preceded by astrology, chemistry by alchemy. Natural agencies, even though found to be uniform in their action, were believed to be personal forces. The primitive notion that all life and activity in nature are due to supernatural powers, and that material objects are inert and dead when these powers cease to animate them, was thus carried into science; and for a long time obstructed its progress. Even after science has emancipated itself from this belief, it is long before it absorbs the province of the supernatural, and asserts the universality of the principle of uni-

formity. There is a large class of phenomena which are so variable and apparently so lawless, that it is long before it is believed that the methods of scientific induction are applicable to them. It is deemed profane to investigate phenomena believed to be the direct acts of supernatural powers, as if they were identical in nature with ordinary uniformities. It was believed that there were certain matters, the knowledge of which the gods reserved to themselves, and others which men could ascertain by the exercise of their faculties; and these two classes of events were held to be essentially distinct. Socrates recommended his friends "to perform affairs of necessary consequence in such a manner as he thought that they would be best managed; but concerning those of which it was doubtful how they would terminate, he sent them to take auguries whether they should be done or not. Those who would govern families or cities well, he said, had need of divination; for to become skilful in architecture, or working in brass or agriculture, or in commanding men, or to become a critic in any such arts, or a good reasoner, or a skilful regulator of a household, or a well qualified general, he considered as wholly matters of learning, and left to the choice of the human understanding; but he said that the gods reserved to themselves the most important particulars attending such matters, of which nothing was apparent to men." "It was the duty of men to learn what-

ever the gods had enabled them to do by learning, and to try to ascertain from the gods by augury whatever was obscure to men."\*

It was reserved to modern science completely to demolish the distinction between events having fixed natural relations, and those that were regarded as actions of spiritual powers to whom only they were known; though this result was anticipated, particularly by Hippocrates. Grote relates that "Hippocrates, the contemporary of Socrates, denied the discrepancy, and merged into one the two classes of phenomena—the divine and the scientifically determinable—which the latter had put asunder. Hippocrates treated all phenomena as *at once both divine and scientifically determinable.*"† As knowledge extends, the class of the scientifically determinable is enlarged; and what is added to it is taken from the other class. When our experience is amplified, we have better opportunities of testing the universality of observed uniformities; and our confidence in these invariable relations is strengthened, when we find them to hold beyond the limits both of time and space within which they were first observed.

But it is not this confirmation by more extended experience which tends most powerfully to strengthen the conviction of the invariable character of certain observed uniformities. When

\* Memorabilia of Socrates, Book I. chap. i. 6—9.

† Grote's History of Greece, vol. i. p. 499.

it is discovered that some particular uniformity is not a mere isolated fact, but that it may be inferred from a wider generalization, the experience of its truth is strengthened by the much wider experience of the truth of the general principle on which it depends. This is not merely the strengthening of one experience by another of similar extent; but of a necessarily narrow experience by one infinitely wider. We may have found a certain relation to hold good in every case that has come under our observation, we may never have heard of an instance of its failure; and yet it may ultimately be discovered that the relation is not universal. Our experience at the best is necessarily limited; and we cannot with any degree of confidence assert, that what we have invariably found to be true, will be true universally. If however we have invariably found two such propositions to hold good, and if it can be shown that both may be inferred from one proposition, the probability of the truth of this general proposition is greater than that of either of the others taken singly. The number of observed uniformities deducible from a single general proposition may be so great, that the probability of the correctness of the general proposition may be so strong as to be equivalent to absolute certainty, though each of the propositions on which it is founded, considered by itself, could not be fully relied on. A great number and variety of observed facts determine



the truth of the general proposition by which they are all explained; and the general proposition once established gives to each particular generalization a degree of certainty which no amount of observation could bestow. The truth of a general proposition is confirmed when it not only corresponds with experience, but leads to the discovery of facts which have not hitherto been observed, but which are disclosed by experiment. If it conflicts with some accepted proposition, it will be found either that the proposition involves more than the general principle embraces, or that its truth has been too hastily assumed.

The discovery of general propositions greatly favoured the adoption of the principle of natural uniformity. The course of nature was found not to be constituted by a series of independent uniformities, each of which might or might not be universally true without implicating the others, but to be a system of mutually dependent parts. The establishment of general propositions led the way to the discovery of successively higher generalizations, and thus strengthened the belief in the unity of the system.

Though this principle of uniformity might be admitted to characterize one class of phenomena, it did not follow that it prevailed universally. The extension of knowledge, however, not only confirmed the belief that certain phenomena observed uniform laws; but led to the conviction, that all

nature was subject to invariable relations. It was discovered that apparent irregularities, which seemed to throw doubt on certain general laws, were in reality due to the operation of these laws. The variety which characterizes natural phenomena was found to be due, not to any unaccountable change in the relations that things bear to each other under the same conditions, but to the great complicity of the causes which act and re-act on each other. The uniform laws of nature are thus masked by an apparently exceptional and arbitrary course of events, which, when rightly understood, confirm our conviction of their universality. We are entitled to judge of the unknown by the analogy of the known; and the progress of discovery has shown that we are right in so doing. Many phenomena which were supposed to be perfectly arbitrary have been shown to be determined by uniform laws; and from these laws phenomena hitherto unobserved have been predicted.

The discovery that uniformity prevails where it was not previously expected to be found, not only extends the bounds of the scientifically determinable, but shakes belief in the existence of a class of phenomena essentially different from that in which uniform relations have been observed. The only ground for making such a distinction is this, that certain phenomena are known to be embraced within uniform laws, while others are not. The distinction does not depend on any

essential difference in the phenomena themselves, but on the extent of our knowledge. There is no positive evidence that the relations that subsist amongst phenomena, which have not been scientifically explained, are of a variable nature. This is assumed merely because of its apparent truth, and because uniform relations have not yet been discovered ; but appearances are, as we know, frequently deceptive ; and supposing uniform relations to exist, it is easy to show why they have not been discovered, and indeed never may. Though it may be impossible to discover laws which will embrace all the results of observation, we may still be able to obtain approximate generalizations ; and it may be shown that some of the elements which are included in the phenomena exhibit uniform relations. The events of history, for example, and moral phenomena in general, may not be susceptible of expression in laws rigorously exact ; but the approximate generalizations which have been arrived at, by a strictly scientific method, imply the existence of invariable relations even in this department of nature. Science may never enable man to predict the weather ; but we know that the air, moisture, heat, electricity, and all the elements that go to make up this complex variable result, observe uniform laws. We have no reason to suppose that the whole involves the principle of variable relations in the same circumstances, if the parts which compose it so far as

known are subject to fixed laws. The most general of all physical laws—the law of causation—we have every reason to believe is universal. There is no known exception to it; and apparent exceptions always disappear as knowledge extends; for all changes without apparent cause have been found to be due to the presence of a cause which had been overlooked, or the withdrawal of a cause not known to have been removed.

When men came to perceive that the division of phenomena into two classes essentially different in their nature is founded on ignorance, and that the real distinction consists in the comparative facility with which the laws which regulate them can be discovered, the most complex and obscure being the last to be explained, their views regarding the supernatural required to be modified. Previous to this, it was generally believed that variable events which had no obvious natural relations, and which could not be predicted, were in a peculiar sense under the divine direction; and that even the uniform course of things was sometimes interrupted by supernatural interference. Events apparently not subject to law, and interferences with known laws, were alike divine acts. When the distinction between the two classes of phenomena, to which we have referred, was destroyed, complex variable events were in no respect more divine than the most simple uniformities of common observation. All events alike

were parts of a system pervaded by uniform laws. The whole of nature was now conceived as having the same relation to the supernatural, as that department of it which was formerly distinguished as having uniform relations. Nature is a realm of cause and effect, in which necessity reigns—every event being determined by pre-existing conditions, according to fixed laws. The supernatural is something which is not part of this system, but exists without it, and is independent of it. The supernatural is superior to the natural, and this superiority is believed to be manifested by interference with the natural course of events. Nature resembles a machine which would act in a uniform manner, unless the hand of the person who has charge of it interfered to vary its movement. Whatever is observed in nature, which is not produced by natural agencies in accordance with natural laws, is believed to be due to a supernatural agent. The supernatural is a power acting upon the system of nature from without that system, and producing effects which would not have been brought about by the powers of the system itself; and consequently its manifestation is to be sought for in those events which are believed to imply the interruption of natural sequences. The modern conception of a miracle, as a suspension of, or interference with, the laws of nature, could be formed only after knowledge had progressed so far as to lead to the belief in the

universality of law. It is only after the course of nature has been ascertained, that any conception can be entertained of interference with it.

Knowledge, by limiting supernatural power to interferences, tends to restrict belief in its exercise. Such interferences, if admitted at all, must be confessed to be rare; and though it is possible that they may frequently occur in phenomena the laws of which are not known, the rigorous mode of thinking engendered by the study of science discourages the ready acceptance of interferences which cannot be proved to be such. As knowledge progresses, the belief in the supernatural declines. The ghosts disappear with the dawn. There is a growing indisposition to credit narratives of modern miracles. Remarkable events which, in a former age, would have been at once ascribed to miraculous agency, are attributed to unknown causes, or to an unusual concurrence of known causes. The appetite for the wonderful having declined, no new legends are invented, and old ones are discredited. The ancient miracles which accompanied the institution of the accepted religion may still be adhered to, and the modern conception of a miracle is employed to prove their validity as evidence, though it is obvious that a very different view of their value in this respect must have been entertained at the time they are said to have been wrought.

Contemporary with this progress in know-

ledge, and ascribable to it, we experience other changes which contribute to revolutionize opinion on the subject of the supernatural. The emotion of wonder is restrained and elevated by the increase of knowledge. Instead of the gross passion which we still observe amongst the uneducated, absorbing the mind to the exclusion of the reason, or else biassing the judgment, and credulously demanding the coarsest gratification, its greatest excitement is in observing unexplained phenomena, and in tracing the operation of laws in cases that seem exceptional or paradoxical. Science destroys the vulgar mystery attached to events which appear to be caused by supernatural power, but discloses a deeper mystery in the universal prevalence of law; in mutual relations between things apparently isolated; and in the vast extent of the unknown and inscrutable.

Another change which has tended greatly to diminish the belief in the supernatural is the comparative exemption from the enslaving emotion of terror now enjoyed. Knowledge of the properties of natural objects enables man to apply them to his use, and thus he is less dependent on the natural agencies which surround him than he is in the infancy of his race. Of those who possess about the same extent of knowledge, the most superstitious are those who are most exposed to changes which they cannot predict or control. The advantages of science are extended to those

who are not themselves scientific. The result of most of the work in which men are now engaged can be looked forward to with some degree of certainty; and thus they acquire confidence in themselves, and enjoy a sense of security and comfort which is most congenial to the exercise of the faculties, and totally opposed to the feeling of terror.

With all the knowledge that has been acquired, we are still liable to unforeseen accidents, which sometimes mar even the most reasonable projects; and our happiness, and even our lives, are sometimes still exposed to natural agencies which we cannot control. But it is not the apprehension of known evil which most powerfully excites terror. It is the uncertainty as to the extent of the evil which most appals; and even the uncertainty of its occurrence at all unhinges the mind. In a state of ignorance, everything unusual is apt to excite alarm. The properties of things and the conditions under which phenomena present themselves being unknown, the imagination is free to attribute any extent of possible evil to what may in reality be harmless, though unusual. The ignorance which inspires terror also leads to the ascription of extraordinary virtues to things perfectly inert,—as in the belief in charms. Though our knowledge of the course of nature is too imperfect to enable us to predict the occurrence of many events which deeply concern our well-being, we are able to form



some estimate of their probability and of the natural limits to which they are subject, and thus to relieve ourselves from the fear of dangers which are purely imaginary. An evil, the occurrence of which is anticipated, and of which we know the worst, is disarmed of half its terrors.

We have endeavoured to show that the conception of supernatural agency varies with the progress made in knowledge. In all ages, however, it essentially implies the existence of a spiritual being, either in the sensible world, or living apart and controlling it according to its pleasure. Physical power apart from volition would never have been regarded as supernatural. The belief in the supernatural has its root in the difficulty of conceiving physical agents without supposing them to be possessed of consciousness. After attributing to them self-derived activity and consciousness, it is an easy step to suppose them endowed with all the other qualities which characterize human beings. The human spirit is the type of all supernatural agents. Every supernatural event is regarded as the act of a spirit; even though the analogy of human action affords no explanation of the way in which the act is effected. So closely are the supernatural and the spiritual identified, that belief in the supernatural, in the common acceptation of the term, means belief in ghosts and apparitions, which are but counter-

parts of man himself, though of a vague and shadowy character.

In the infancy of our race, every event would be regarded as supernatural. Every sensation which arrested the attention would excite the delight and wonder of a first impression. Before associations were formed, before even the rudest classification of natural objects and sequences was made, everything would appear isolated, and be ascribed to direct spiritual agency. When we say that all events were alike supernatural, we mean that they all implied spiritual agency. Supernatural has no meaning except as the correlative of natural. The natural and the supernatural were conceptions alike unknown to the primitive races. The distinction implied could not have been perceived, for to them there was no nature, no fixed order of things,—but an infinity of sensations rushing in upon them, and exciting in them the most intense emotions. A distinction however would be made between spirit and matter,—mind and body. In material objects, as in themselves, they recognised the combination of both. The elements owed all their motion, activity, and life to indwelling spirits, without whom they were inert, dead, worthless. The spirit manifested itself through actual phenomena; its actions were real events. There were the sensible world of impressions and the unseen spirits by which they

were upheld; the one could not be conceived without the other, and both constituted their universe.

When some idea of the course of things has been attained, a distinction is made between known uniformities and apparently irregular and unforeseeable phenomena. The accustomed order of things is regarded with indifference, except so far as it is necessary to the practical purposes of life; and those events alone are ascribed to the gods which excite the emotions, and which, in consequence of their apparent freedom from connexion or dependence on antecedents or consequents, appear to be related only to the will and power of the spiritual agents whose acts they are believed to be. An event is the more wonderful, the more it differs from what is usually experienced; and the more wonderful it is, the more likely is it to be the work of a supernatural power. There is no difficulty in supposing the wonted order broken up, for there is no limit to divine power. Phenomena are believed to cohere as isolated and mutually independent things placed together. Their coherence is not known to be related to a number of successively higher generalizations, and thus to be bound up with the whole system. A supernatural event, at this stage of progress, is simply a wonderful event, considered apart from uniform connexions and solely in relation to the unseen spiritual being from whom it is believed to

proceed. The desire to gratify the emotions, the unrestrained exercise of the imagination, and the honour thus supposed to be conferred upon the gods, give rise to narratives of the most extravagant wonders, which more or less characterize all religions, and which seem to be accepted the more readily, the more opposed they are to ordinary experience. There is sufficient in real occurrences, when viewed under the influence of emotion, to afford ground for this belief in the supernatural; and the belief once attained requires but a small foundation of facts, or, it may happen, none at all, to construct narratives which will afford it ample gratification. The mind passes very readily from interpreting real facts in accordance with prevailing emotions and modes of thinking, to constructing the facts themselves. The idea conveyed in the one case may be as false as in the other; and the actual occurrence of the events from which the idea is derived may be a matter of very little consequence. It is the mode of thinking which is of special importance to us.

When knowledge is confined to the simpler and more sensible relations of things, and before exact methods have been devised for estimating quantities, the miracle is simply the wonderful and superhuman. The changes in the natural order of things which men can merely wish for, the gods can effect. When the whole universe so far as known is perceived to be a cosmos,—a system of uniform

relations and mutual dependance, when the law of causation is found to hold wherever inductive inquiries have been made, the belief in miracles declines and their true significance is disclosed. Wonderful events with no apparent relation to antecedents or consequents are now seen to be equally subject with others to the law of cause and effect, and an event, to be supernatural, must be freed from all uniform relations; and its exceptional character must be real as well as apparent. God is placed altogether outside the universe, and the universe itself is regarded as a system having an independent existence within the limits of the powers and laws originally conferred. But God is not to be considered inactive, and as He does not require to uphold existing powers, His activity can only be manifested in reconciling them or in creating new agencies, and thus altering the natural sequence of events. The providence of God,—or the mode in which He manifested Himself to mankind, consists essentially in interposition. According to the primitive belief, God manifested Himself in every event; according to the latter view, only in those events which cannot be accounted for by natural causes. A miracle is an interference with the natural uniformities; and is supernatural, not only because it cannot be explained by the laws of nature, but because it is believed to imply the existence of a power which is not comprehended in the natural

uniformities, and which is superior to them inasmuch as it can alter them at will. Modern miracles are discredited, but such of the ancient miracles as are adhered to are, in accordance with this conception of the supernatural, believed to have been divine interferences with physical laws.

There is a still more advanced stage of opinion, but as it has as yet been entered by a very few, it is unnecessary to do more than notice it here. All knowledge is of phenomena; things by themselves cannot be known from the very nature of knowledge. We know only the properties of things, the substance which possesses these properties being wholly unknown. Nature is a system of definite and uniform relations. There is therefore nothing in nature which is not known or which may not be known. Nature embraces the whole of the knowable, so that whatever is without nature must necessarily be unknown. If we undertake to say what the supernatural is, we can only do so by assimilating it to something in nature, and thus representing it as a part of nature or the knowable. We can explain a thing only by bringing it under a more general known class; but there can be nothing in nature capable of explaining that which is above nature. The supernatural, if knowable, might explain the natural, but the latter can never explain the former. To represent the supernatural as spiritual is to assume that it may be known. When we say that the

supernatural is the spiritual, we offer an explanation of it, for we class it with personal agency. The supernatural agent may be represented as more mysterious than a human being, but he is conceivable only to the extent he is assimilated to humanity. But a thing that is explained must be part of the system which supplies the explanation, so that the supernatural when explained ceases to be the supernatural. The spiritual may be the highest form by which we can symbolize the supernatural, but it is as far from representing the unknowable as the most concrete and sensible form. The supernatural, then, is not the spiritual, but simply the unthinkable, the unconditioned or infinite.

## CHAPTER III.

### NATURALISM AND SUPERNATURALISM, CONTINUED.

WE have seen that the primitive mode of interpreting the sensible world is to regard every event as the act of an unseen spiritual being. At a more advanced stage of progress only such events as are not obviously related to antecedents and consequents in a uniform manner are considered supernatural; and ultimately it is ascertained that all events are alike subject to natural laws, though these laws are discovered with more facility in some cases than in others. The conception of the divine agency is dissociated from uniform sequences, and is retained in connexion with those events only which do not appear to be regulated by fixed laws. When men arrive at the conviction that law and order prevail universally, it is obvious that they must either give up the idea of the divine agency altogether, or form a different conception of its mode of operation. If God is manifested to us only by unrelated acts, we lose this manifestation of Him, when we cease to



believe in the existence of such acts. We are thus led to question whether we have been right in dissociating the idea of the divine agency from the uniform course of nature. Instead of His agency being restricted to phenomena which are believed to be free from fixed relations, we may find that uniformity is a mode of action not inconsistent with the freedom of a personal agent, and that law and order is a higher manifestation of intelligence than mere arbitrariness. There is however considerable difficulty in passing from the one mode of thinking to the other. To a person accustomed to look for the divine agency in variable and apparently unrelated phenomena, and in interference with ordinary sequences, the belief in the universality of law seems to exclude this agency altogether; and it is some time before the new mode of thinking is so rooted in the mind, that the conception of interference becomes as alien to that of divine agency as the belief in uniformity was formerly. When we regard events as acts, we consider them in relation to the will of the agent alone; and this will being self-determined, and therefore we conclude arbitrary, we do not expect to find any necessary connexion between one act and another. Indeed invariable uniformity of relation would seem to be incompatible with our conception of volition. We think of God as a being whose power carries into effect every wish; but we have a difficulty in un-

derstanding how every wish can be gratified, if the established uniformities remain unaltered. The laws of nature appear to be conditions limiting the free exercise of the divine power. Accordingly we find that events which are apparently isolated, because their connexions are not known, are believed to proceed more directly from God than the common uniformities.

This conception of the arbitrariness of the divine agency is natural to a certain stage of progress, and arises from the partial view we are apt to take of the natural relations of things. When we consider will by itself, we regard it as arbitrary, because it is self-determined. Its acting in one way or another depends on nothing external to itself, and therefore cannot be predicted. But volition is not a faculty having a separate and independent existence. It is one of many mental faculties, and is not known except as associated with them, though it may be thought of apart from them. Accordingly men do not act spontaneously for the purpose of indulging their power of volition, but their actions though free have relation to their other faculties and emotions, and are therefore to some extent capable of being predicted. The more highly developed the faculties are, the more uniform is the course of action pursued. The confidence with which we may predict the line of conduct a man will pursue in certain known circumstances, will be greater, the more cultivated

his intellect is, and the wider the extent of his knowledge. You cannot tell what the uncultivated or ignorant man will do, for you do not know what fallacy may mislead him, or what erroneous supposition he may be acting upon. Arbitrariness of action does not arise from strength of will, but from ignorance or fickleness of disposition. Action approaches uniformity in proportion as the actor reasons correctly, and extends his knowledge. In the case of the Deity absolute freedom of action is joined to perfect wisdom and knowledge; and accordingly we would expect the divine agency to be characterized by perfect uniformity. Regularity of action is not inconsistent with freedom. One does not act less freely when he acts more intelligently and consequently more uniformly. A perfect being cannot but act according to reason, but this necessity is compatible with perfect freedom. Voluntariness is not manifested by wrongdoing only.

The order which we perceive in nature, instead of excluding volition, is the best proof we can have of the existence of an intelligent agent. The most recondite system of mutual dependence and uniform relation, must be the most appropriate manifestation of infinite reason. Order is the index of mind, and we have evidence of the existence of mind wherever we perceive it. The farther we can trace law in the universe, the more elevated does our conception of the divine perfections be-

come; and when we cannot ascertain the uniform relations which determine the course of events, we know that it is not because confusion prevails, but because there is a higher reason expressed in the phenomena than we have as yet been able to comprehend. Were an undoubted instance of the failure of a uniform relation to be observed, it would weaken the argument for the existence of a supreme intelligence founded on the presumed universality of order. The uniformity expected in this supposed case might perhaps be deducible from some general law, and its non-occurrence would be opposed to the logical dependence of things; and would therefore indicate a defect in that natural order which is the best index we have of the divine intelligence.

The conception of divine agency may be retained, though all events are regarded as alike natural and uniformly related. The operation of God is seen in the natural uniformities, and the laws of nature are the expressions of His will. The providence of God is thus identified with the operation of natural causes; and we understand this providence in proportion as we are acquainted with the natural order through which it is manifested. Interference with natural sequences, instead of being the only way in which the divine providence can be manifested, is simply inconceivable. If every event be ascribed to God, and if uniformity characterize His mode of acting, to sup-

pose Him to interfere, is to suppose Him doing a thing and at the same time opposing it. In one sense, every event is providential, for it is part of that universal order which is the evidence of a universal intelligence. In another sense, only those events are providential which are intelligible to us ; for God is manifested to us only so far as we can trace law and order. There is no essential difference in the events themselves. The distinction is caused by the limited range of our knowledge,—the laws of the one class of events being partially known to us, those of the other wholly unknown.

All events being alike providential inasmuch as they have fixed relations, there is no scheme of providence in favour of nations or individuals which is inconsistent with the universal order. A belief in special providence was very naturally associated with the conception of favoured races. It was a doctrine adapted not only to the state of knowledge, but also to the prejudices of the times. More correct views are accompanied with wider sympathies. Events are apt to be regarded in relation to the interests of those they affect, and not in their relation to natural antecedents and consequents, and these interests may sometimes be inconsistent with the uniform course of things. The Jews believed that Jehovah was their national God, and that events were so ordered by Him as to favour them, and to discomfit their enemies. The

Christian Church believes that providence is administered in its interests, and in opposition to all false religions. Even sects believe that God is on their side, and that everything that favours them is peculiarly His doing. There is no consideration of the relation of events to the universal order; or if there is, it is believed that this relation is entirely subordinate to the interests of a class. The belief in the universality of law and order is opposed to the conception of favoured classes, and consists with the recognition of all men as children of a common Father. The events which affect the interests of particular classes or individuals are related in a determinate manner to the whole system of things, and no class will be favoured to the extent of compromising their natural relations. Those only are on the side of God, who act morally, intelligently, and reasonably.

We have said that when science has progressed so far as to establish a strong presumption in favour of the universality of natural law and order, the belief in modern miracles declines; and the ancient miracles which are still credited are defined to be suspensions of natural law, or interferences with the natural order of things, in consequence of the intervention of a supernatural power. We have now to consider how far this explanation of miracles is consistent with the universality of natural law, or with the views of the divine agency which best accord with belief in this universality.

Previous to all experience, one event is just as probable as another. It would not astonish a child to hear a horse speak, to see a stone float in water, or a piece of wood sink. At first phenomena are associated in the mind simply because they are observed together, and without any perception of a logical connexion between them. To suppose them separated does not offend the reason. When only empirical laws were known, there would be no difficulty in conceiving interruptions to them; for it was found that though generally true, they could not be invariably relied on in circumstances differing much from those in which they have been observed. The idea of the suspension or violation of a law would not appear unreasonable to those who were accustomed to see the only natural laws they were acquainted with fail. But when it is known that an empirical law depends upon other laws, from which it may be deduced by a process of ratiocination, or upon some one law and certain uniform conditions, to suppose such a law to be violated implies that the abstract processes of thought do not correspond with observed facts. We cannot conceive even a law, for which we can give no reason but which has been established by a rigorous induction, to be violated, without losing all confidence in scientific methods; and consequently all faith in the uniformity of natural relations. When we can give a reason for the law being such as we find it, and can deduce it by a

strictly logical process from some more general law, to suppose it violated is to suppose its necessary connexion in reason to be destroyed, and the deductive process in this instance at least fallacious. If the general law is ascertained to be an ultimate law of nature, it is as impossible to conceive any observed phenomena depending upon that law to be different from those which may be inferred, as that the conclusion of any abstract process of reasoning should be opposed to that which is legitimately deduced from the premises. J. S. Mill defines an impossibility to be "that, the truth of which would conflict with a complete induction."\* If miracles are asserted to be violations of natural laws, they are not merely embraced in the definition of an impossibility, but the two things are identical. An impossibility is a miracle, and we know no other. If an antecedent were not followed by its consequent, without the intervention of any counteracting cause, the most general and therefore the most certain of all laws, the law of cause and effect, would be found to fail. A law such as this does not admit of exceptions,—its failure in a single instance would be fatal. But if this law had to be rejected, if the same antecedent were not in the same circumstances followed by the same consequents, there would be no laws of nature at all, and consequently no violations of them. Accordingly it is now held by those who have the

\* Logic, vol. ii. p. 163, *note*.



clearest perceptions of the universality of natural law, that miracles are not deviations from law, but the fulfilment of higher laws than those known by us. When an extraordinary event is witnessed which cannot be accounted for by known causes, we cannot believe that there is any failure of the universal law of causation, and accordingly we assume that it is due to some cause, and are led to inquire the nature of this cause.

According to Bishop Butler, "Miracles must not be compared to common natural events, or to events which, though uncommon, are similar to what we daily experience, but to the extraordinary phenomena of nature; and then the comparison will be between the presumption against miracles, and the presumption against such uncommon appearances, suppose as comets, and against there being any such power in nature as magnetism and electricity, so contrary to the properties of other bodies not endued with these powers."\* Miracles, though rare and apparently unconformable to the ordinary course of things, are not more improbable than certain natural occurrences which are not regarded as miraculous; but no reason is assigned for regarding the one class of events supernatural and the other not. As the events themselves do not afford any ground for such a distinction, it must be founded on some antecedent probability or assumption.

\* Butler's Analogy, Part ii. Ch. ii.

If miracles are regarded in reference to law, instead of cause, they are represented as events which cannot be explained by, and even seem opposed to, all known laws, but which result from laws which have not yet been discovered, and which may indeed be undiscoverable by the human faculties. They appear to be violations of the order of things with which we are familiar, but are consistent with a more extended system in which this order of things is embraced. They are miracles to us only because of our ignorance. They do not differ essentially from other natural events; they fulfil a natural law, and the only difference between them and other events consists in this, that the laws which regulate the one class are known, those which regulate the other are unknown. The all-important point is the admission that they are natural sequences as much as other sequences; and provided it is acknowledged that they are regulated by law, it is of no consequence that it is a higher law unknown or unknowable by us. All that a miracle establishes according to this view is the existence of some unknown law,—it supplies evidence of the divine agency in no peculiar or exclusive sense. Indeed it affords a less satisfactory proof of the divine operation than those events which can be satisfactorily explained by known laws. If a miracle be defined to be “the result of some higher law to us unknown,” we are surrounded with miracles; and the miracle of one age may

be an elementary scientific fact in the next. This view of the nature of a miracle gets rid of the difficulty connected with the supposition of its being a violation of a natural law, but at the sacrifice of its evidential value.

Others have thought that miracles had some analogy to those cases in which local uniformities are disturbed by causes proceeding from beyond the sphere of common observation,—as when an unknown storm far out in the Atlantic causes an unusually high tide at some port situate at a distance from the ocean. But as an extraordinary event does not differ in any essential particular from the most customary occurrence, the disturbance of the wonted uniformities is a natural though remote result of a real though unknown cause; a miracle, if it is to be compared to such events, does not differ at all from a natural occurrence, and has no peculiar significance, except what arises from its rarity. The cause which counteracts the sequences with which we are accustomed is a natural cause, though it but rarely invades the province of our observation; and if a miracle is merely an apparent exception to an ascertained law of causation, in consequence of the interference of another cause, it differs in no respect from such phenomena as the ascent of smoke, or of a needle to a magnet in apparent opposition to the law of gravity. The probability of the interference of such a cause in a particular instance, or of its existence at all with-

out having been observed on any previous occasion, must be taken into consideration in judging the credibility of an alleged miraculous narration; but in the case of every observed extraordinary phenomenon we do not hesitate to assert that it is due to the intervention of some cause. Those who hold that a miraculous event is no exception to general laws, yet distinguish between it and extraordinary natural occurrences; but as there is no essential distinction, the distinction must be wholly in the mode of viewing them. An extraordinary occurrence is regarded in its natural relations to antecedents and consequents; but in the case of an alleged miracle, natural relations are altogether ignored, and the relation of the event to the Deity as an expression of His will is alone considered.

Miracles are now very generally held to imply no breach of the law of cause and effect, but their peculiarity is believed to consist in the nature of the cause by which they are produced. In the case of a miracle, the natural causes involved produce their usual effects, but there is superadded a new cause,—namely, the intervention of a supernatural agent by which the result is greatly modified. We have now to examine the grounds on which this assumption is made.

Science is engaged in tracing existing uniformities, and recognises no other than natural causes. If an extraordinary event cannot be accounted for by known causes, the presumption is that it is due

to unknown causes ; and we would have no right to affirm that such causes did not exist unless the whole extent of nature were known to us. No miracle therefore can be proved to be brought about by other than natural causes unless it is shown that adequate natural causes do not exist, which can never be done by those who possess but a limited knowledge.

Even though we were assured that no natural causes existed capable of producing some extraordinary effect, we could form no conception of any other ; and the so-called miracle would be simply a mystery. We learn what causation is from our experience of invariable sequences, and we know no causes that are not themselves effects. It is to such causes that the universal law of causation applies. The cause and the effect must be both known in order that the relation between them may be determined ; and if a hypothetical cause is assumed to account for some phenomenon, it must be analogous to some known natural cause. If the intervention of the divine will is said to be the cause which counteracts some customary sequence, it must be regarded in the light of a natural cause ; and to have any presumption in its favour, it must be analogous to some known natural cause ; accordingly Dr Brown, who argues that miracles are not violations of the laws of nature, repeatedly speaks of the will of the Deity as "a new physical antecedent," "a new circumstance of physical

causation,"\* and "as one of the powers of nature as much as any other power whose hourly or momentary operation is most familiar to us."† Besides, the will of the Deity can only be known as analogous to human volition, and must be a natural cause in the same sense that volition is. "Our will causes our bodily actions in the same sense, and in no other, in which cold causes ice, or a spark causes an explosion of gunpowder."‡ A miracle can be shown not to be a violation of natural law only by identifying the divine will with natural causes. It would be a breach of the law of causation, were it not the effect of natural causes. It differs in nothing from any other extraordinary event; and the causes which produce it must be determined by scientific methods applicable to all events alike.

Let us suppose that an unusual occurrence has been witnessed, and that we are led to speculate on its cause. "Nothing can ever prove that it is a miracle: there is still another possible hypothesis, that of its being the result of some unknown natural cause."§ There may exist causes sufficient to account for it which are wholly unknown; and even known causes in peculiarly exceptionable circumstances produce unexpected effects which seem to be at variance with the laws

\* Brown's Inquiry into the Relation of Cause and Effect, note E, p. 395.

† *Ib.* p. 405.

‡ Mill's Logic, vol. i. p. 383.

§ *Ib.* vol. ii. p. 159.

of their action. It does not follow that no adequate natural cause exists because no such cause has hitherto been observed, as Babbage has shown by an illustration taken from the calculating machine.\* But suppose we are led by the analogy of human volition to the conclusion that the intervention of some spiritual agent is the most probable cause, let us see what this implies. It presupposes belief in the existence of such a being. Assuming this, let us inquire how far the analogy of human volition will avail us. Man, it is said, is himself a supernatural power. Nature is the realm of necessity, in which the law of causation universally prevails. Man, so far at least as his will is concerned, is not determined by causation. He is not a part of nature, though living in it; but a self-determining power, capable of acting upon the lines of causation from without, and therefore supernatural. He cannot create any new force. His body is part of nature, and acts upon surrounding agencies according to fixed laws. His will merely directs existing forces;—how it does so we cannot tell. He acts upon nature without any violation of natural law. God also is a supernatural being, and his action upon nature does not, it is said, differ essentially from that of man, and is not more wonderful or mysterious. “Nature is prepared to be acted on by a divine power, just

\* Ninth Bridgewater Treatise, chap. viii.

as it is to be acted on by a human, in the making of gunpowder, or the making and charging of a fire-arm. For, though there seems to be an immense difference in the grade of the results accomplished, it is only a difference which ought to appear, regarding the grade of the two agents by whom they are wrought." \*

It is necessary to examine this analogy a little more closely. Man controls his voluntary muscles, and through them operates on surrounding objects, producing effects which would not have taken place without his intervention. We cannot suppose that God, like man, controls one portion of nature alone, and the rest through it. He is equally related to all nature. His relation to nature corresponds with that of the will to the voluntary powers of the body. "In one view, we may regard the Almighty Ruler of the world as the sensorium and active brain of the world; having an immediate power of action through every member and every line of causes in it; able in that manner to maintain a constant living agency in its events, without really infringing its order, or obstructing and suspending its laws in any instance." † But if God so dispose the forces of nature, the disposition of them which we observe is to us the manifestation of His will. We cannot suppose nature to have an independent existence,

\* Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 59. † *Ib.* p. 253.



—to be capable of following a certain course which may be altered by the intervention of the divine will. We do not know nature except as pliant to the will of God, and its constant expression. Interference affords evidence of human action, because the world exists independently of man; and its forces are to some extent controlled through the operation of his bodily powers. But we have no reason to suppose that God acts directly and immediately on one part of nature, and indirectly and mediately on another. We do not know how the natural forces would dispose themselves apart from the divine will. There is no reason for supposing that they would act uniformly and that the divine will interferes with this uniformity. Is not the invariable order which we observe the very disposition which God is pleased to make? Besides, natural forces are not independent existences which may be disposed arbitrarily without any change in their nature. The forces and their disposition are mutually dependent, and both alike express the divine will.

A miracle is a special manifestation of divine power only to those who believe that some degree of independent power resides in natural agencies. Accordingly we find Cudworth, for example, speaking of "the reluctance and inaptitude of matter." By some, natural agents are represented as delegated and subordinate powers. These suffice to conduct the ordinary course of nature, but it is

supposed that there are emergencies in which it is necessary that the divine will should supersede these powers, and itself become the immediate cause of some desired effect. Those who regard nature as an independent existence naturally expect that God will manifest himself by interfering with it. If He does not declare himself *through* it, He can only do so by showing himself *above* it. It was only when nature came to be regarded as a fixed system apart from God that the conception of interference was formed, and events apparently opposed to the observed course of things were considered to be the best attestations of the divine activity. To many this view is not satisfactory. It represents the divine power as limited by the powers of nature, though superior to them. Suppose this view to be resigned, and that the course of nature came to be recognised as the expression of the divine will, we would no longer appeal to interruption of it as evidence of the divine providence. If we believed that the power of God, as well as his wisdom and goodness, were manifested in the laws of nature, we would cease to look for these attributes in violations or suspensions of the laws.

It may be said that though God may choose to act after a uniform manner in general, he may occasionally depart from it; but if we already believe that every natural phenomenon is a divine act, an unwonted mode of action affords no more

evidence of the divine activity than the most familiar uniformity. It would arrest the attention on account of its rarity. It would proclaim the voluntariness of the divine power, though uniformity is in no way inconsistent with freedom, but it would not be more peculiarly divine than the ordinary course of procedure. Dr Brown's definition of a miracle applies to every occurrence viewed in the light of theism. "In strict philosophy," he says, "all events, which have resulted from the direct operation of the divine power, and would not have been but for that operation, are to be ranked as miraculous."\* All events are equally miraculous, and none can be selected and regarded as exclusively so, unless all the rest are looked upon as resulting from independent powers. Though it is admitted that God may vary his mode of action, it is to be remembered that the course of nature is in general uniform; and consequently there is an antecedent improbability against the occurrence of any event at variance with this uniformity; and even were such an event witnessed, it is not to be regarded as in any sense more miraculous than the most familiar incident.

After we have acquired the knowledge of the existence of the Deity, we may conceive Him acting at one time after a uniform manner, at another contrary to that uniformity. But if no dependence could be placed in the permanence and universal-

\* Brown on the Relation of Cause and Effect, p. 420.

ity of natural law, what certainty could we have that there is a God? The order universally found in nature is held by many to be the only evidence we can have from nature of a Supreme Intelligence. This order arises from the perfect uniformity which prevails in natural relations. It is because the universe is a cosmos that it is intelligible to us; and because it is intelligible to us, we believe it to be the manifestation of a Divine Intelligence. The argument for the existence of the Deity would be weakened, in proportion as this order is disturbed.

Again, the argument from causation would be equally uncertain. Every miracle is an apparent exception to the law of cause and effect. The existence of a supernatural agent as its cause, apart from any certain knowledge derived from other sources, is only a probable supposition. Were there many cases of apparent interruption to natural law, we could not be certain of the universality of the law of cause and effect. And if this law is not a necessary truth, but admits of exceptions, why may not the existence of the universe itself be one of these exceptions?

If, then, we admit that God may act after a uniform manner at one time, and in a way contrary to that uniformity at another, we weaken the evidence for His existence, which is derived from the observation of nature. We do not get quit of the difficulty by affirming that our knowledge of the existence of God is due to a primitive revelation,

for this revelation must have been attested by miracles, and miracles imply belief in a supernatural power. The means of conveying the knowledge of God thus presupposes its possession. There would still remain the evidence derived from intuition, but this intuitive knowledge would not be confirmed by the observation of nature.

We have thus seen that if a miracle be defined to be a violation of a law of nature, it is simply an impossibility. If an antecedent is not followed by its invariable and unconditional consequent, it is because of the interference of some counteracting cause ; and if it is asserted that in the case of a miracle this cause is the will of a supernatural being, it is nothing more than a matter of opinion, and the will of God is identified with natural agencies. If we ascend to an *à priori* view and regard all phenomena as the immediate acts of God, and the laws of nature as the expression of his mode of acting, we may suppose this uniform mode to be departed from without any contradiction. On this supposition a miracle does not proceed more directly from God than accustomed uniformities, and this supposed want of universality weakens the proof of the existence of God. To one who believes that order is the correlative of mind, and that the universe is the work of God because it is intelligible to human reason, a miracle is a breach of order ; and therefore an evidence, not of supernatural power, but of confusion and unreason.

The credibility of testimony has been much discussed in connexion with miracles, but supposing the good faith of the witness to be admitted, the difficulty lies solely in the interpretation of the extraordinary occurrence which he narrates. That it is due to supernatural interference can only be a matter of opinion; and we have seen that this opinion is open to very serious objections. If we believe that order and uniformity prevail as far as investigation has been carried, and that anomalies when understood are found to be no exceptions to known laws, the presumption is that extraordinary events are due to unknown natural causes, rather than to a change in the mode of the Divine operation. It must ever be more probable that such an unknown cause has intervened, than that an established natural law has been violated. We cannot conceive an event separated from its natural antecedents and consequents without giving up the law of causation altogether. As regards ancient miracles, Brown and Mill have shown that if they are to be considered exceptions to laws established by a rigorous induction, no amount of testimony can suffice to authenticate them. The truth of testimony can never be more than an approximate generalization, and it must ever be more probable that it should fail than that a rigorously demonstrated law should turn out to be false. Babbage has shown that the probability of the truth of testimony may be greatly increased by multiplying

independent witnesses who concur in their statements, but the improbability of its falsehood must ever be less than the improbability of the occurrence of an event which involves the violation of a natural law. The improbability of the alleged restoration of a dead man to life is not to be estimated by taking into consideration the number of human beings only who have died since the creation of the race. It is the improbability that there has occurred an exception to the general law that all living things, vegetable as well as animal, die without restoration.

It is not necessary to assume that violations of natural laws have actually occurred in order to account for the belief in miracles. The belief in witchcraft can be explained, without admitting the existence of persons possessed of the powers which were ascribed to witches. We know that it is the ignorant who most readily believe in modern miracles. The only exception is to be found in the case of those who, from their peculiar religious training, are prepossessed with views which lead to the expectation of miraculous interference. An extraordinary event is a miracle only to those who believe that supernatural power is manifested exclusively in such events. We know that at the time miracles are alleged to have taken place this mode of thinking prevailed; and no conception had as yet been formed of the universality of natural laws. The belief in the supernatural cha-

racter of extraordinary events was the natural product of the age, and was in harmony with all the other features of the civilization of the time.

It was this belief that caused miracles to be regarded as an attestation of the Divine commission of the person who performed them. Mythical stories which gratified the appetite for the wonderful and accorded with religious expectations would spring up spontaneously and receive a ready acceptance. Any unusual natural occurrence, seen through the prism of religious fancy, would form a sufficient nucleus, and successive narrators would not fail to add to the original wonder. Supernatural interference is the universal belief of mankind, until, by the progress of knowledge, they arrive at the conviction of the universality of natural law. It must be admitted that we have in these considerations a sufficient explanation of the belief in miracles. The actual occurrence of miraculous interferences at various times and in different places would also explain the popular belief, but not so satisfactorily. It does not account for its universality, for few will not be prepared to admit that miraculous interferences have taken place so generally as to influence the belief of all nations and races. It does not explain its decline, nor its extinction among a certain class and its continuance among others. Besides, the belief in false miracles must be accounted for by assuming imposture if we do not admit a general disposition to believe in the



supernatural, but imposture will not originate a religious belief, though it give a questionable support to it during its decline. Even were this explanation as satisfactory as we could wish it to be, it is unphilosophical to assume a hypothetical cause, or a cause the existence of which is at best only probable, to account for phenomena which can be satisfactorily explained by known causes. The psychological explanation, therefore, is not only preferable to the other, but excludes it.

The disposition to believe in miracles arose from the prevalent mode of thinking. The authenticity of a miraculous occurrence was not in general questioned, because it had an antecedent probability. It was a miracle because it was extraordinary and wonderful; and it was by such events that God was supposed to reveal himself. It was the more obviously a divine act, the more it corresponded with the character ascribed to the divine being. It was not deemed a miracle for the reason that would now be given. It was never questioned whether it was analogous or opposed to the known course of things; it was rare, and a likely thing for the god to do, and that was enough. No distinction was made between uncommon or anomalous natural events and such as implied a violation of the laws of nature. That the most extravagant narratives should find a ready credence in this state of knowledge, and whilst this mode of thinking prevailed,

is not to be wondered at. Real occurrences were often so wonderful, as to encourage the belief that others even more extraordinary might take place. There would be no critical examination into the truth of an alleged miracle, when there was no indisposition to believe it.

This credulity was accompanied with an incredulity equally unreasonable. We are inclined to believe or disbelieve things according as they seem to us probable or improbable, and this depends upon the nature and extent of our knowledge. Unreasonable credulity and incredulity are alike to be ascribed to defective knowledge. The ignorant are apt to reject whatever seems opposed to their narrow experience. The mere fact of it being different from what they have been accustomed to is sufficient. To the scientific man this is a ground for caution, and more complete investigation, not for rejection; he positively and at once refuses to accept only such reputed facts as obviously contradict well-established natural laws. This incredulity in the ignorant is quite consistent with belief in the most extravagant narratives, if they are ascribed to the direct agency of the gods. Such wonderful works are expected of the gods, more particularly such as correspond with the character attributed to them. Extraordinary events are viewed with this prepossession, and we know that the hypothesis we entertain regarding a fact has a great influence upon our mode of

observing and describing it. It causes us to attend to what seems to confirm the hypothesis, and to neglect what is opposed to it; and even more than this, we are apt to believe we have actually seen what we have merely inferred. In this way, and without any intention to deceive, a real event may be so described, as to be utterly incredible to one who approaches nature with a mode of thinking completely different. The state of feeling with regard to the events we are observing has even more influence than our intellectual preconceptions. We are so apt to exaggerate those aspects of an event which kindle emotion, that great allowance must be made for this tendency, in estimating the accuracy of the narratives of such events. In accounting for the credulity of past ages, the powerful influence of the imagination, and the disposition to believe in the reality of what is merely conceived, must not be forgotten.

When the divine power is no longer exclusively associated with extraordinary events, but is believed to be equally displayed in the most familiar uniformities, the belief in miracles is lost. The disposition then is to consider individual facts in relation to antecedents and consequents according to known laws, and to regard the Deity, not as related to one class of facts more especially than to another, but as equally related to all;—the whole being regarded as a perfect cosmos, though imper-

fectly comprehended. Formerly nothing was too extravagant or too wonderful to be believed, provided it was a likely thing for the gods to do. When God is not expected to manifest Himself after this manner, such occurrences have no antecedent probability; and when related, the narrative is subjected to the same rules of criticism as are applicable to all other events. If it implies the failure of a natural law without any counter-acting cause, it is totally disbelieved. If it is merely opposed to natural analogies and empirical laws, it is regarded as improbable, but is admitted when the evidence is satisfactory. It is never believed to differ essentially from facts, the natural relations of which have been discovered. We are stimulated to further investigation, in order that some more comprehensive law may be discovered, by which the apparently anomalous character may be explained. If the early mode of thinking encouraged the belief in miracles, and the modern scientific mode is opposed to it, we have a sufficient explanation of modern scepticism in the change from the one mode of thinking to the other. We do not disbelieve in modern miracles simply because they do not occur, but because they are inconceivable. Where there still exists a disposition to believe in miracles, there is no scarcity of them, even at the present day. What is regarded as a natural occurrence by one man may be a miracle to another, and the disposition

to believe in miracles originates reports which have no foundation in fact. The change that has taken place, then, is not in the facts, but in the mode of receiving them.

We find that belief in ancient miracles may continue amongst those who discredit all modern miracles. They are believed because they are ancient, and chiefly because they are connected with truths of the most vital importance. Those who believe in chaos, catastrophes, and all violent interruptions of natural order, place them in the remote past. If there ever was a different order of things, it is more probable that it existed a very long time ago than in comparatively recent times. The belief in ancient miracles is a relic of the early mode of thinking which has survived in consequence of certain favourable conditions. It does not extend to all miracles indifferently, and is not determined by the strength of evidence alone. Each admits only those miracles which are supposed to attest his religion ; all others are false. A miracle which is adduced to authenticate a false religion is at once rejected without any inquiry into evidence. Great difficulty has been felt in fixing the precise period at which the age of miracles closed. If it is brought too near modern times, it will embrace miracles performed by those who entertain false doctrines ; if it is placed near the origin of Christianity, we are naturally led to inquire why it may not be placed still earlier so

as to exclude some of the Scripture miracles themselves.

We have another exemplification of the persistence of the old mode of thinking in the tendency to believe that God may interfere amidst the complex phenomena which surround us, where it would be impossible for us with all the scientific knowledge we possess, or are ever likely to possess, to detect it. It is obvious that such interferences, though unobserved, are as much miraculous as those which impress the senses and command attention, though the term miracle is exclusively applied to the latter. The opinion is still very generally entertained that it is by such alleged insensible interpositions that the providence of God is exercised. God is admitted to act in the order and harmony of nature so far as they can be detected, but this general providence is believed to be supplemented by a special providence, by means of which particular results are produced, not provided for, in the general laws. The same objections apply to those insensible miracles as to the others. From their very nature they cannot be proved from observation, for they would cease to be insensible were the circumstances in which they are alleged to take place so well known that any departure from the natural laws involved in them must be detected. It is impossible to affirm positively that the laws of nature are sufficient to produce some observed result, when we do not know

the laws themselves, or are unable to calculate with exactness their effect. This has been well put by Dr Brown, who says,—“We may know, for example, when we look at some tottering wall, that the first great hurricane will throw it down among the ruins which have long been mouldering at its base ; but who is there that can venture to predict the very instant at which it is to be overthrown ? And if it should fall the very moment after some wanderer whom it had been sheltering had quitted it, who is there that will venture to say with confidence, from his knowledge of the laws of gravitation, and of the lateral force of currents of air, that its fall was at the very moment which might have been predicted, and, without any providential interference, could not have taken place while the wanderer was near enough to be a sufferer ?”\* In such cases the possibility of interposition cannot be excluded, but as little can it be proved. It cannot be shown that natural agencies are inadequate to produce some complex result, for this would imply a perfect knowledge of these agencies,—which is contrary to the supposition. The fact of interposition therefore rests entirely on its antecedent probability, and this again depends on the view we take of the divine acting. According to the old mode of thinking, nothing could be more probable than divine interposition. Indeed, to have denied it would have

\* Dr Brown's Cause and Effect, p. 425.

been equivalent to denying the existence of God altogether. According to the scientific mode of thinking, God is manifested in law and order; and as all analogy leads to the belief that this order is universal, and that apparent breaches of it are so in consequence of our ignorance, the presumption is that the divine power is invariably exercised in accordance with natural law.

The doctrine of special interposition is thus a relic of the early mode of thinking, and is being gradually superseded by the scientific mode. Several causes combine to retard its inevitable decline.

Considerable difficulty is felt in dissociating our religious emotions from the old conceptions of the divine manifestation, and associating them with views more in accordance with modern science. Until it becomes perfectly natural to conceive God as acting only through invariable law, the denial of interference will be felt by many to be irreligious. The association of feeling with certain intellectual conceptions continues though the conceptions are discovered to be erroneous; and the feelings themselves are liable to suffer a shock from the failure of the intellectual form through which they have been hitherto expressed. Some time must elapse before the new association becomes as strong and as natural as the old.

There are some who admit the existence of certain general laws, but who have no clear con-



viction that all relations are uniform in the same conditions, and that events apparently the most fortuitous are as much subject to law as the most obvious uniformities. By such the idea of divine interposition may still be retained, for it is not brought into antagonism with the scientific mode of thinking, if the interposition is confined to those phenomena in which scientific relations are not perceived. This is the condition of the great mass of partially educated people at the present day. Complex and variable phenomena, the laws of which are not known, and which do not depend on immediate and sensible antecedents, may readily be regarded apart from natural relations and as the more direct operation of the Deity, even after considerable progress has been made in science. The two modes of thinking may subsist together without coming into violent opposition, each being exercised in its own province.

The difficulty of conceiving how the special providence of God, as manifested in every particular event, is compatible with a system of general laws has also tended to obstruct the progress of the scientific mode of viewing the divine acting. It is said that omnipotence itself cannot combine "the advantage of regular order in the sequences of nature, and the advantage of an uniform adaptation of the particular circumstances of the moment, to the particular circumstances of the indi-

vidual.”\* It would seem absolutely necessary that he should interfere with the operation of natural laws in order to provide for special emergencies. The government of the world by general laws implies the absolute dependence of every event upon these laws, and thus the divine will seems to be circumscribed. We conceive God at the first organizing a system of uniform relations, and afterwards desiring a result not provided for in that system. This is an essentially anthropomorphic view of the origin of things and necessarily imperfect. To a finite being the adoption of a rule would be a limitation of the freedom of action. Let us suppose, by way of illustration, that one has a certain number of articles to make each of a different description, and that he has resolved to make them all of the same material. He may find when he proceeds to make them, that the material he has fixed upon cannot be wrought into all the requisite forms, and thus he is prevented by adopting a certain rule from effecting his purpose. He fails because he has to work upon a given material, the nature of which he cannot alter. To a Being of infinite wisdom and power, uniformity in the mode of acting may be no restraint on the will.

General laws do not necessarily imply a paucity of results. From the few general laws or axioms

\* Dr Brown's Lectures, vol. iv. p. 451.

of mathematics, an indefinite number of propositions may be deduced. Every event may be regarded as the expression of the divine will, and at the same time related to antecedents and consequents by uniform natural laws. It is not necessary to suppose that God requires to interfere with these uniform relations, in order to manifest His will on particular occasions; for this may be provided for in the nature of the uniformities themselves. The universal prevalence of natural law is consistent with the evolution of an infinite variety of phenomena; and the individual results thus produced may be the very results intended in the circumstances and at the time they occur.

In thinking of general law as opposed to special providence, we are apt to attend to those obvious uniform or periodic phenomena which are so in consequence of the uniformity or periodicity of the conditions on which they depend, rather than to those general laws which cannot be comprehended without considerable power of abstraction, and are the latest acquisitions of science, in consequence of being masked by the frequency and extent of the interference to which they are subject. The constancy of these great natural uniformities and the felt impossibility of resisting them produce some degree of fatalism. They are incapable of being bent to meet emergencies, and we find ourselves helpless in their presence. These are the laws which we conceive the Deity to have established from the

beginning and to have endowed with a delegated power; and we believe His special providence to consist in occasional interference to accommodate them to special circumstances. Though generally beneficial, they might in some cases be productive of harm if allowed to follow their natural course, and to prevent this, interference is necessary. There is not felt to be a like incompatibility between the more abstract general laws and special providence. The phenomena which exemplify them are of an eminently variable character, and consequently they do not convey the idea of irresistibility. Such natural laws may be counteracted by others, and thus a particular result may be brought about without any violation of the laws themselves. This distinction however is merely apparent. The most obvious empirical laws are such in consequence of the general uniformity of the conditions on which they depend, and these again are in accordance with other natural laws. The most isolated phenomenon depends on a concurrence of causes, and that concurrence is itself in accordance with law. The interposition of a counteracting cause which would not have occurred naturally, though not a violation of the law which it counteracts, implies the violation of some other natural law. Individual phenomena of a complex character are as incompatible with the doctrine of special providence as phenomena which obviously belong to a class, if special providence be held to

imply suspension of natural law. It is from the observation of individual phenomena that general laws are ascertained, and it is by them that they are verified; and there could be no general laws, if individual phenomena were not due to their concurrence.

There is no necessity for assuming the fact of interposition at all. God's providence is abundantly manifested in natural laws, and is not required to compensate their deficiencies. Interference implies that natural causes are sufficient for most purposes, but not for all; and as man is regarded as the sole object of special providence, it is admitted that natural law determines all relations except in so far as they have to be accommodated to the condition of man. If so much can be done by natural causes, why may not all? Does not this supposed difference as regards mankind arise solely from the idea of man's superiority to the world and to animals? Being superior, God is regarded as taking a peculiar care of man, and the peculiarity is supposed to be shown in the subordination of natural relations to his benefit.

If the beautiful order and harmony we observe in the world may be expressed in natural laws so far as our capacity to trace them extends, there is no reason for supposing that man himself is any exception. His body is but a higher form of a type which prevails in the animal creation. His relations to the world and to his fellow-men are not

arbitrary, but are as much subjects of scientific investigation as the relations of matter. The superiority of man is seen not in the violation of law in his interest, but in the higher laws that are exemplified in him. These higher laws are not opposed to the lower, but are as it were built upon them and presuppose them.

We cannot conceive God as acting in relation to time, strictly speaking perhaps as acting at all. If we cannot conceive Him supplementing the deficiencies of law, neither can we conceive Him pre-ordaining a course of action, and then designing a set of natural laws which He foresees will on every occasion and in all time exactly realize it without any subsequent interposition. Such providence is not required in an infinite Being. The providence of God can be seen only in what exists. General law is just general providence, and special providence is manifested in individual phenomena so far as they illustrate general law. All events are alike providential, for they all exemplify natural uniformities; and we know the providence of God in proportion as we know the natural relations of things. In the connexion in reason between the general law and the individual result,—a connexion which we find and do not create, a connexion also extending infinitely beyond our power of research,—we have the best evidence of a Supreme Intelligence; and if, in accordance with the primitive instinct of humanity, we regard each occurrence as

the immediate act of Deity, and the laws of nature the uniform modes of His acting, and call this the providence of God, it is obvious that we must identify providence with law and not with the violation of law. The laws of nature thus become the exponents of the divine providence. We regard certain events as exclusively providential, not because they differ from other events in relation to natural uniformities, but because we are disposed to view them in a different light. Non-providential events, or such as belong to the general providence of God, we are disposed to regard in their natural relations; special providences are those isolated events which deeply interest us, and which we connect with the divine favour or frown. This disposition to select certain events, and to regard them as expressing certain dispositions towards us in the Deity, leads us to view the providence of God as confined to such events. We ascribe a certain character to God, and we believe or disbelieve events as they seem to accord or conflict with that character. "Writers have not yet ceased to oppose the theory of divine benevolence to the evidence of physical facts, to the principle of population for example. And people seem in general to think that they have used a very powerful argument, when they have said, that to suppose some proposition true, would be a reflection on the wisdom or goodness of the Deity. Put into the simplest possible terms, the argument is, 'If it had

depended on me I would not have made the proposition true, therefore it is not true.'''\* We must just accept what laws we find, and if we cannot form a consistent or complete character by inference from them, we merely meet with a difficulty we did not create, and one which we cannot overcome by first assuming a certain character and ignoring all in nature that seems inconsistent with it. There must be difficulties, for the universe can only be seen in part. What we do know is complete so far as it goes. The individual passes away, but in the permanent relations which it illustrates we have at least a glimpse of the Supreme Intelligence.

\* Mill's *Logic*, vol. ii. p. 331.



## CHAPTER IV.

### OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

WE have seen that we can form no adequate conception of the relation between God and His works. The reciprocal action of mind and matter is the only possible type we can have of this relation. We have no experience of mind except as manifested through a material organism, and yet we represent the Deity as purely spiritual. Both mind and matter are finite, and the observed relations between them must be very imperfectly analogous to the relations between the infinite and the finite. The only analogy we can have must be derived from created objects, but the relation between even the highest of them and the lowest must be essentially different from that existing between the uncreated One and the dependent creation. The coexistence of the infinite and the finite appears to us to involve contradictions. The order and harmony of the universe is held to imply a divine Intelligence, and intelligence has no meaning to us except in connexion with personality; but the idea of personality seems to be

inconsistent with that of infinity, because it involves a distinction between the thinker and the thought, the conscious self and the different modes of consciousness, and is, therefore, a limitation.\* Our conception of God as a person may be inadequate, but He can only be known under the same conditions that everything else is known by us. We cannot transcend the conditions that are implied in all consciousness. We may attempt to form highly abstract and spiritual ideas of God in which all distinction of attributes is lost; but the image becomes more faint the more the essential relations of personality are obscured, and disappears entirely the moment they are completely obliterated. If the infinity of the divine personality is said to be apprehended when the mind transcends the conditions of its consciousness, it is vain to assert what can never be known. We can form no distinct conception of God except as a person, and this we do through the consciousness of our own existence as persons. However abstract our conception may be, it is still inadequate; and if too abstract, God comes to be regarded as a principle rather than a person, and ceases to have any hold on our affections.

Though we cannot conceive God except as a person, it does not follow that we are entitled dogmatically to affirm that He is possessed of certain attributes, and of these alone; or to infer from

\* See Mansel's *Bampton Lectures*, p. 84.

them His manner of acting. The order of the universe cannot be inferred from the attributes of God, for the conception of God as a person possessed of attributes is wholly inadequate. The administration of the divine providence by general law has been argued from the immutability of the divine nature. To this mode of reasoning it has been justly objected by Mansel that we gain no advantage, "even in philosophy, by substituting the supposition of immutable order in time for that of special interposition in time," that "both of these representations are doubtless *speculatively* imperfect: both depict the Infinite God under finite symbols."\* Though both representations are inadequate, one of them may still be preferable to the other. We do not object to the doctrine of special interposition because it is more anthropomorphic than the other, or because it is not consistent with our views of the divine immutability. The doctrine that providence is manifested through natural law is, we think, to be preferred, not because it is more in accordance with preconceived views of the character of God, but because it is more consistent with our experience of nature. Though it be an inadequate representation of God as an infinite Being, to conceive Him as acting, yet being compelled so to represent Him as the condition of our being able to represent Him at all, it is necessary that the mode of His acting should cor-

\* Mansel's Bampton Lectures, p. 187.

respond with the observed course of nature. We only know God's providence by experience, and we believe this providence to be administered by natural law, because law has been found to prevail wherever circumstances have favoured investigation. The doctrine generally entertained of providence was not derived from scientific observation, but was adopted when there was no difficulty in conceiving events separated from their natural antecedents and consequents. It is inconsistent with a belief in the universality of the law of cause and effect, and we find accordingly those who adhere to it in the present day doubting this universality even in the material world, and denying its extension to mental phenomena. In Mansel's Bampton Lectures we have the following passages. "Is there any truth in the assertion, so often put forth as an undeniable discovery of modern science, 'that cause and effect are indissolubly chained together, and that one follows the other in inevitable succession?' There is just that amount of half-truth which makes an error dangerous; and there is no more. . . . In the material world, if it be true that the researches of science *tend towards* (though who can say they will ever reach?) the establishment of a system of fixed and orderly recurrence; in the mental world we are no less confronted, at every instant, by the presence of contingency and free-will."\*

\* P. 189.

strong ground for preferring the doctrine of direct interference, if it is to be accepted in the hope that, contrary to all experience and all analogy, some instance of the failure of the law of causation may yet be discovered. In the physical world, this law is the most general, and consequently the most certain, of all the laws that have been traced,—so much so that it is believed by many to be an intuitive conviction. In the mental world the uniformity of moral phenomena is being every day more and more recognised. Accordingly we find some writers who believe in interference compelled to limit the power of self-determination to the will alone, and to admit that even it is greatly restricted in its executive force. Thus Bushnell, “In certain parts or departments of the soul itself, such as memory, appetite, passion, attention, imagination, association, disposition, the will-power, in him is held in contact, so to speak, with conditions and qualities that are dominated partly by laws of cause and effect. . . . As far as they are concerned, he is pure nature, and he is only a power superior to cause and effect at the particular point of volition where his liberty culminates, and where the administration he is to maintain over his whole nature centres.”\* If all the faculties of the mind but the will operate according to law, it is highly improbable that it should be an exception; and it is difficult to conceive one faculty so completely iso-

\* Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 51.

lated from all the rest as to belong to a totally different system of things. Uniformity of relation among mental phenomena is not inconsistent with the consciousness of freedom, or with moral accountability ; but is a fact founded on experience as certain as that of freedom itself. Even supposing the will not to be determined by antecedents, the conception of interference can only be entertained by those who regard the system of nature as having an independent existence, subject to the control of the divine will occasionally exercised. If, on the contrary, we conceive nature itself to be a manifestation of the divine will, the uniformity which pervades it is simply the uniform mode of its expression.

The objections which we mean to notice arise from a supposed inconsistency between the ordinary conceptions of God, and the representation of His providence as manifested by natural law. Though we cannot but represent God as a person, it is not necessary to suppose that He is endowed with all the human emotions, such as revenge or emulation ; and though we must conceive Him as acting like a person, it is not necessary to conceive His mode of acting to be analogous in every respect to the human mode. We use the analogy so far as it is necessary to facilitate our conception, but it must be limited by our experience. God must be related to nature in a way very different from that in which man is related to it ; yet

we represent Him as designing, providing, superintending, and making special and immediate efforts on behalf of individuals,—as if these processes with which we are so familiar were exact counterparts of the modes of operation pursued by God. So confident are most people that this is the way in which God acts, that they allow this belief to override their experience, instead of conforming their conceptions to it. They believe that God interferes with natural processes exactly as man interferes, and therefore they expect to find interruptions and breaches of continuity; and if they cannot see them, they will persist in maintaining that they are there though we may be unable to discover them amidst the complexity of natural causes, notwithstanding all the evidence to the contrary derived from experience and analogy. Being compelled to represent God as acting, though to do so may be speculatively incorrect, it is not on that account a matter of perfect indifference *how* we depict Him as acting. The highest form of human action is surely a better type of the divine acting than the lowest. We ascribe to God intelligence and moral perfection because we know what intelligence and morality are in ourselves; and the intelligence and morality ascribed to Him exceed the highest conceptions we can form of these attributes. We form to ourselves the highest idea of intelligence and morality which our experience and imagination enable us to con-

ceive, and we represent the divine intelligence and morality as something exceeding our highest ideal. Because there are some speculative difficulties connected with the application of the term infinite even to the highest conception of these attributes, and with the ascription to God of attributes at all, it is not a matter of indifference whether we represent these qualities as possessing a greater or less degree of perfection. They command our adoration only when they surpass our highest conceptions. It is this which constitutes them divine; and the being who did not possess them in this perfection could never be regarded by us as God. So also of power. Human action is the type of the divine, but the divine power exceeds the highest form of the human we can conceive, else it would not be divine. It is also power administered by the highest conceivable intelligence. The highest and most intelligent form in which power is exercised by man is therefore the best type of the divine power. A mechanic who shows superior skill by constructing a machine, which, by its construction, provides against certain contingencies, other things being equal, is a better type of the Divine Being than the artist whose machine requires adjustment when the occasion arrives; though we are perfectly ready to admit that God is not a mechanic and the world not a machine.

The more we identify the divine mode of acting with those modes with which we are most familiar,



the more distinct is our conception of it, as our conception of God is clearer the more closely we suppose Him to resemble man. We know that in whatever way we represent the divine activity to be exercised, the analogy is very imperfect; but if extended further than experience warrants, it becomes positively false. We must sacrifice distinctness of conception to truth, and adapt our representation to the fact of the universality of law. The doctrine of providence through law seems inconsistent with the lower forms of human action, and hence the objections that are brought against it. These objections may be met by showing that the fault lies with the objectors, and that the doctrine is perfectly consistent with the highest conceptions of action.

It has been objected to the representation of providence as manifested by natural law, that it fails to express the subordination of the material to the moral world, and the special interest taken by the Deity in the latter generally and in the spiritual welfare of individuals. Man believes himself to be of infinitely more consequence than all natural objects, animate or inanimate. He does not regard himself as a part of the world, but places a wide gulf between even the lowest specimen of humanity and the most intelligent creature. Nature is something external to him. He is an independent being living in nature, but deriving nothing from it. His consciousness of

existence is the only reality ;—all nature being merely phenomenal, and deriving what seeming existence it has from its relation to the mind.\* This conception of the independence and superiority of man finds expression in the opinion that the material world exists for the sake of man alone, as the mere platform on which he is to act his part ; and that all events are subservient to the divine purposes in relation to man, and have no other significance.

The relations of natural phenomena to human welfare, being those in which man was chiefly interested, would be the first to be observed. Before the mutual relations of things were known, it was natural to suppose that all things existed solely for the use of man. The sun and moon were made to give him light and to measure his time ; the showers fall to fertilize his fields ; animals exist to aid him in his labour, or to supply him with food. He is the end and final cause of all things ;—nothing existing for its own sake. When the ordinary arrangements of nature are insufficient to meet his wants, special interpositions are made on his behalf ;—a natural providence suffices for all other sentient creatures. The organization and instincts with which God has endowed them, and the fitting localities in which they are placed, supply all the conditions necessary to their welfare ; and in these God's providence is

\* See Mansel's Bampton Lectures, p. 88.

manifested so far as they are concerned. But man, being infinitely superior to the brutes, must be watched over by a special providence. A distinction must therefore be made between the natural providence which suffices for them, and the providence which is demanded in consequence of the greater importance of man. We believe that the ordinary course of events, though sufficient for inferior natures, does not in all cases meet the wants of man, and may even in some instances be opposed to his welfare; and the providence he requires is one that will supplement these deficiencies, or interrupt natural sequences when hurtful. This watchfulness, according to the analogy of human affairs, is required to meet contingencies; and as the divine agency can only be manifested either in creation or in the direct production of events, the greater activity which superior care implies can only be exhibited in immediate interposition. Providence, in the religious sense of the term, is therefore supernatural, for otherwise it could not be distinguished from ordinary providence. All that is supernatural has special and exclusive reference to man. We delight to suppose that we are not lost sight of amidst the infinity of natural objects, but that God has His attention so to speak specially directed to us; and the best proof that this is really the case is to be found in events which are obviously designed for our benefit alone. If the means employed lead

to no other end than our good, we are entitled to conclude that we have been singled out to be the recipients of the divine bounty. The strength of human interest is shown by its concentration, for if widely diffused, it must necessarily be weak, and we readily conclude that the divine care can be manifested only in such events as have exclusive reference to its objects.

As science advances, the mutual relations of things are more clearly perceived. The earth ceases to be the centre of the universe, and man ceases to be the end of all earthly things. The world seems to be a whole made up of parts, which are ends as well as means. Human welfare does not depend on the exclusive subserviency of these parts, but on the perfection of the whole system. Because we discard the supposition of direct interposition altogether, it does not follow that we can find no expression for the superiority of mind to matter, or of man to other sentient beings, in the representation of providence by natural law. Though man is superior to all other creatures, this superiority is based on much that is common with them. The higher form succeeds the lower, and is developed out of it; the lower supplies the conditions which render the higher possible. To constitute the higher form, it is not necessary to suppose that there must be any violation of the laws which prevail in the lower. There is merely something added to the lower which by combination with it

produces a new and superior result. The superiority of man, as we have already said, is proclaimed not by the violation of laws in his interest, but by the higher laws which are manifested in his nature. That he has been so highly endowed is sufficient proof in itself that he is the object of God's superior care.

It has also been objected to the view of providence as administered by natural law that it represents us as less immediately, as well as not so specially, the objects of the divine care. We take the analogy of a human protector, such as a parent or friend, and extend it beyond its legitimate application. The services of a protector are called forth to relieve a person who is actually suffering, or to avert a danger which threatens. There is an immediate appeal followed by immediate effort. If we suppose that the protector has for some time foreseen the danger, and has made such prior arrangements as will avert it without any necessity for further interference, he is not the less a protector because his interference was remote.\* An abiding tender feeling which prompts the intellect to foresee danger to others and to provide against it is preferable to that passing sympathy which is called forth by the presence of distress. The remoteness of the interference, instead of indicating less watchfulness and care, is evidence of a higher emotional nature and of an

\* See Babbage's Ninth Bridgewater Treatise, Chap. xii.

intelligence and power fitted to inspire us with greater confidence.

We cannot conceive God except under the condition of time, and we conclude that the uniform relations which we observe were established at some particular moment, and were made such as to provide in all future time, and without the necessity of interference, for all the wants of His creatures. Were we to suppose interference to take place in order to produce a result not contemplated, it would imply imperfection. According to this view the providence of God is not manifested in interferences, and though we were to conceive it to have been exercised before creation, its remoteness would not detract from its perfection. It is however liable to the objection that it represents God as an inactive spectator of His works. It depicts Him as designing and instituting, at some particular moment, a system which has impressed upon it from the first laws which provide for every emergency as it occurs. This system, having been once for all established, is abandoned to the operation of the powers and laws with which it has been endowed ; and as it requires no interference, it receives no immediate superintendence. God's activity is supposed to be manifested in the work of creation and in occasional interpositions. When not thus engaged, he is represented as inactive. If we suppose that the universe was created at once and impressed with

laws which determine everything that God designed to accomplish, and that at the desired moment, and without the necessity of subsequent interference, we obtain a more exalted idea of the wisdom of God ; but we represent Him as totally inactive after the work of creation has been accomplished. The doctrine of special interposition does not confine the divine activity to the moment of creation, but represents it as put forth occasionally during all subsequent ages, and the fact that God interposes when human welfare renders interposition necessary shows not only that He has not ceased working, but that He is constantly watching the course of events, so that we cannot be exposed to danger without His knowledge. This doctrine therefore expresses our sense of God's watchfulness and care, though it implies a less elevated conception of His wisdom in devising the scheme of nature at the beginning. According to the one view the creative power is exerted once for all ; according to the other, the original creative effort is supplemented, as occasion requires, by subsequent efforts, implying a continuous superintendence.

The difficulty does not lie in determining the periods during which the creative power was exerted, but in forming a conception of the divine activity itself. To represent God as exercising power at all is a very inadequate conception, which involves us in contradictions the moment we proceed to reason upon it if we assume it to be a complete

representation. Though inadequate, we can form no other ; for if we conceive God at all, it can only be from the analogy of finite relations. While we take human action as the type of the divine, we must not forget the essential distinction between them. Human power is the power of a created and dependent being. It is not self-originating and independent, but belongs to man as part of the system of created things. Besides, it is exercised upon the surrounding world which is independent of him, and upon which he can act only in accordance with laws which he cannot alter. The mechanic merely adjusts certain objects in order to produce a desired result, and his ingenuity consists in selecting the appropriate objects, and adjusting them to the best advantage, so as to require as little subsequent interference as possible, though this can never be altogether excluded. The machine when once constructed is independent of the artificer ; at least to the extent that interference can be dispensed with. If we depict God as an artificer, and the world as a perfect machine requiring no interference, we certainly represent Him as inactive after the construction of the machine has been completed. But the relation of God to the world must be very different from that which a mechanic bears to the machine he has constructed ; and if we employ this analogy to aid our conception of God, we must remember that it is necessarily defective, and that we



cannot draw conclusions from it as if it were a complete representation.

We make a distinction between the creation and the maintenance of the universe. This implies that nature once created has some power of subsistence within itself, but also requires for its continuance an effort on the part of God different from that by which its creation was effected. We are apt to be misled by the analogy of mechanism. For aught we know, the maintenance of the world may be a continuous act of creation. The first act may have contained all the laws exemplified in all subsequent acts. As this continuity pervades the whole without compromising the divine sovereignty, and as we cannot conceive God but in relation to time, we are compelled to represent Him previous to the first act anticipating the effects of the laws He was about to establish in all future ages, and so constituting these laws as to avoid the necessity of altering them. We know this is an imperfect conception, but it may be the most worthy conception we are competent to form.

Though we are compelled to represent God as contriving the system of nature at some particular moment, it is not necessary to suppose Him more active at one time than at another. This system in its whole duration must have been embraced in the divine conception. By this supposition alone does nature become intelligible to us. We

cannot understand the present without some knowledge of the past, and the future finds itself anticipated in the present. We cannot understand how the past and the future make together one complete system, the one being imperfect without the other, unless we regard them as the conception of one mind. The near and the distant as well as the past and the future are mutually related, and are intelligible to us as parts of one system. This system in its whole extent and duration must be the product of one mind, and on this supposition alone can we account for the natural dependence of the most distant objects and the development of the future out of the past without any change of plan. "The recognition of an ideal Exemplar for the vertebrated animals proves that the knowledge of such a being as man must have existed before man appeared."\* Being under the necessity of conceiving God in relation to time, we represent Him as first contriving the system of nature and then executing it; but it is a matter of no consequence to us when the conception of this system was formed, or whether it was formed at any particular moment at all, as it is with its manifestation alone we are concerned. It is in nature, as it presents itself to our intelligent observation, that God reveals Himself to us. The more clearly we perceive the unity of this system both in space and time, the more assured are we

\* Owen on the Nature of Limbs, p. 85.

that it is the product of one infinite intelligence. Nature does not reveal God to us more specially at one time than at another. We can at no time separate God from nature, if we conceive it as a manifestation of divine intelligence. Nature appears to us divine in proportion as we comprehend the ideas which it expresses; for "the laws of nature are the thoughts of nature; and these are the thoughts of God." It is to us a perpetual creation, for in its development it is revealing to us a clearer conception of its existence as a perfect whole. "Science tells us with iterated emphasis that the world is always *becoming*. Creation continues. The world was not made once and for ever, as a thing completed, and afterwards serenely contemplated. The world was made and is still making. The primal energies of life are as young and as potent as of old, issuing forth under new forms through metamorphoses higher and ever higher as dawn broadens into day."\*

If we conceive God as active only when he creates or interferes with creation, (and every act of interference is essentially an act of creation,) we must view the world as an existence apart from God who is placed above or beyond it. Nature can be in no sense sacred, and only manifests the divine power when the uniformity of its laws seems to be interrupted. Even those who object to the doc-

\* Goethe's Life by Lewes.

trine of providence by natural law that it represents God as inactive, do themselves represent Him as active only at intervals. Before the creation of the universe He existed alone and consequently inactive, and even now we are told that the creative power is rarely put forth. "It will commonly be found," say M'Cosh, "in regard to such interpositions, that they are only occasional, and after long intervals, and that the miraculous agency is displayed only on the introduction of a new dispensation, and afterwards gives place to the ordinary operation of law."\* Even admitting the force of the objection referred to, it applies to such views as the above as well as to the view of providence which we prefer. In the one case God's activity is displayed at rare intervals; in the other, at the period of creation alone; in both cases, God is represented as inactive except at certain periods.

We believe nature to be a production of the divine mind because thus only is it intelligible to us, but of the time or mode of production we know nothing. It is of no consequence whether the production took place on one occasion, or on several; or whether it is a continuous act. We are chiefly concerned with the evidence that nature really is a product of intelligence, and this we find in the law and order which characterise it. We are apt to associate the idea of God with the

\* M'Cosh's *Method of the Divine Government*, p. 157.

manifestation of power in nature rather than with the manifestation of intelligence. Because we attribute to God the power of creation, there is nothing peculiarly sacred in the power we observe in nature. We are apt to conceive matter as some inert substance to which God gives life and motion, and that consequently force proceeds more directly from God than matter. Force is as essential to matter as extension. We know matter by its power of resistance; and if there is resistance, there must also be extension. Force is a part of nature, and therefore indestructible. If it appears to us to be lost, we know that it is not annihilated, but might be found in some correlative form, did we know where to look for it. We cannot conceive one part of nature created first and another part afterwards added to it, for nature is a whole composed of mutually related parts, and each part is what it is because it is related to the whole. God is manifested to us not by force as such, but by the laws which natural forces observe.

It may be said that science itself proves that God exercises His creative power at particular periods, and therefore manifests Himself more specially at these times than he does in general. It demonstrates that life has appeared in a world previously uninhabited; new species have been created from time to time, and it is believed by some that organic life has been more than once

destroyed by supernatural catastrophes, and that the earth has been peopled by fresh creations. Here, at least, it may be said, we have positive evidence of the divine interposition; and from this we may infer the probability of interpositions for other purposes. Species are supposed to have been created, simply because our knowledge of nature is insufficient to afford an explanation of their origin. "Finding no cause among natural agents fitted to produce the effect, we rise to the only known cause capable of producing it—the fiat of the Creator."\* Because no such cause has yet been found, it does not follow that no such cause exists. Nor, supposing it to exist, is it probable that it would have been discovered. In 1836 Sir J. Herschel wrote: "For my own part, I cannot but think it an inadequate conception of the Creator, to assume it as granted that his combinations are exhausted upon any one of the theatres of their former exercise, though in this, as in all his other works, we are led, by all analogy, to suppose that he operates through a series of intermediate causes, and that in consequence the origination of fresh species, could it ever come under our cognizance, would be found to be a natural in contradistinction to a miraculous process—although we perceive no indications of any process actually in progress which is likely to issue in such a re-

\* M'Cosh's *Divine Government*, p. 155.

sult.”\* Since this was written, the progress of science has tended in a remarkable manner to strengthen the probability of the truth of this happy surmise. Theories have been propounded to account for the introduction of new species, and though some of them have been wild enough, they nevertheless profess to be founded on scientific analogies. The ingenious theory of Darwin, if not completely satisfactory, must be held at least to throw considerable light on the process; and the very possibility of making an attempt, even though it should prove a failure, should prevent us from at once betaking ourselves in despair to an hypothesis opposed to all scientific analogy, and which is very erroneously supposed to afford more assured evidence of the divine activity.

It has also been objected to the naturalistic view of providence, that it presents us with nothing but a frigid system of unbending laws. We are accustomed to view acts as prompted by some immediate emotion. Some occasion arises which calls forth the emotion appropriate to it, and this leads to action in order to gratify the emotion, or to avert painful sensations. But if our actions depended on antecedent conditions beyond our control, we might find ourselves unable to perform the actions which the emotions demand. We cannot understand how varying states of emotion can be mani-

\* Babbage's ninth Bridgewater Treatise, p. 226.

fested by unvarying laws. Human action is ever changing, because the human mind is subject to ever varying emotional states. We know from our own consciousness that certain emotions lead to certain actions, and when we see similar actions performed by others in similar circumstances, we attribute them to the same emotions as we are conscious of in ourselves. We associate emotion with varied action alone, because man is not always in an impassioned state, and his emotions vary in character and intensity. Uniform action could not express his everchanging emotional condition.

A system of uniform laws is readily compared to a machine which repeats the same motions at a uniform rate; and the mind instinctively recoils from such a mechanical view of nature. A machine, while serving a useful purpose by the steadiness of its action, will inflict injury on one who accidentally comes in contact with it; and it contains within itself no power of adjustment to relieve the sufferer. So it is conceived that general laws may be attended with incidental effects prejudicial to individuals or society; and if uniform laws prevail universally, we cannot understand how God can mercifully interpose to save men from the disadvantages which appear to be the inevitable result of such a system.

To these objections, it may be replied that a uniform system, from its essential nature, may in-



dicating the feelings which he who contrived it entertains for the sentient creatures who form part of that system. A uniform and perpetual instrumentality to effect a benevolent end manifests the good-will of the person who has instituted it and who supports it, notwithstanding its uniformity. Although we can form no conception of God except as a reflection of our own personality, it is not necessary to suppose that He resembles man in every respect and passes through various emotional states which are immediately expressed by appropriate natural manifestations. There may be abiding feeling displayed in a uniform mode of action.

The representation of nature as a system of invariable law and order, seems to be distasteful to some because of its uniformity. It appears monotonous and mechanical and destitute of the richness and variety of life.

"Nature, of her gods bereft, obeys,  
Slave-like, mere mechanic power."

Uniformity of law, however, does not imply uniformity of phenomena. The former prevails everywhere; the latter is rarely observed, and is seldom perfect. Every individual object is subject to change, more or less rapid. Some objects change so slowly as to appear to us fixed,—like the slowly descending glacier to the eye of the casual observer. But while all objects are subject to change, they exemplify in these very changes laws which

are themselves unchangeable. Those who are unaccustomed to entertain abstract conceptions see permanence only in apparently stable natural objects ; but true permanence may be perceived everywhere by the eye of reason in the laws which underlie even the most fleeting concrete results. To trace these laws amidst the complex concurrence of causes which nature exhibits, demands the greatest skill and knowledge. It is seldom that a general law receives a pure illustration. It is not like gold found in nature uncombined. This skill, however, has in innumerable instances been successful, and it presumes the invariability of natural law.

Mechanism is opposed to moral liberty, and in nature, as a realm of immutable law, it is said, we see only the "blind force of a mechanical necessity." The exclusive study of nature is held to be deleterious, because it "diverts from all notice of the phenomena of moral liberty," and "habituates us only to the contemplation of an order in which everything is determined by the laws of a blind or mechanical necessity."\* These objections apply to the study of nature considered as an existence altogether separate from God, and manifesting nothing but physical necessity, as opposed to moral liberty. But the world is not a machine existing independent of its contriver, and the necessity which prevails in it is not a blind fate. This necessity is nothing more than the im-

\* Sir W. Hamilton's Lectures on Metaphysics, vol. i. p. 35.

mutability of the natural laws which our reason has in part discovered, and which proves to us that nature is a manifestation of intelligence. It is true that nature, as expressive of the world of matter alone, affords us no illustration of that spontaneous power which we call liberty, and which is found in spiritual beings alone. Man, however, is part of creation, but it is not necessary on this account to suppose that he is a product of matter, and that his spiritual being is the result of his physical organization. Consciousness reveals the existence of higher laws than those which matter exhibits; which higher laws co-exist with those of matter without being derived from them. There may be no inconsistency between law and liberty, though we may be unable to reconcile them. We know God through His works;—through our consciousness, and through nature viewed, not as a dominion of blind fate, but as a manifestation of intelligence.

It is felt by some that a system of invariable laws must act as a restraint upon freedom of action on the part of God. God having, so to speak, established certain fixed laws, must in future limit His action to the range of these laws. “He cannot even act upon His works, save as giving and maintaining the natural law of His works, which law is a limit upon Him, as truly as a bond of order upon them. He is encrusted and shut in by His own ordinances. Nature is the

God above God, and He cannot cross her confines.”\* Nature is felt to be an inflexible system coming between us and God, and preventing Him from holding intercourse with us. This view is based upon the belief that nature, once created, has an independent existence, and that the will of God can only be expressed by superseding or suspending natural laws. If, on the contrary, we regard natural law as itself the expression of the divine will, it is absurd to view it as a limit upon that will. We must assume that this system of nature expresses the whole will of God. We have no reason for supposing that God has any wish beyond, much less contrary to, those manifestations of His will which constitute nature; or that the natural course of things is incapable of expressing the whole will of God, because it is determined by invariable laws.

The representation of providence, which we have given, is objected to as being purely intellectual, and incapable of satisfying the spiritual longings of man. It directs attention to the scientific aspect of nature alone—to the merely intellectual relations of co-existence and succession. The imagination has little scope, for the hypotheses which it frames must accord with natural analogies, and must be continually subjected to the test of facts. It forbids all speculation on subjects which continually suggest themselves to thoughtful minds,

\* Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 61.

but which lie beyond the province of inductive truth. The moral nature of man will not rest satisfied with demonstrated truth alone, or even with theories which may at length be established. "We call that fire of the black thunder-cloud 'electricity,' and lecture learnedly about it, and grind the like of it out of glass and silk: but *what* is it? What made it? Whence comes it? Whither goes it? Science has done much for us; but it is a poor science that would hide from us the great, deep, sacred infinitude of nescience, whither we can never penetrate, on which all science swims as a mere superficial film."\* Nature is felt to be mysterious, divine. It is not a mere mechanical thing which we can explain by physical laws; but it has an animation which engages our sympathy, and many qualities which appeal to other faculties than the intellect.

Nature may be regarded by us in two very different aspects. It may be investigated solely with a view to ascertain the intellectual relations which are expressed in it. Phenomena are interesting only so far as they illustrate law. The mind remains calm, serene, and indifferent as regards the objects investigated. On the contrary, we may be interested in the concrete results we daily observe, without caring at all to investigate their causes, or to reduce them to system. The phenomena attract

\* Carlyle's Lectures on Heroes, Lect. I.

us because they appeal directly to our emotions, and symbolise our moral life. In primitive times the intellectual and the emotional aspects were combined: they are now separated. The philosopher investigates laws and causes, the purely intellectual relations of matter; the poet views nature in its emotional aspect, and his imagination is not restrained by the necessity of accommodating its creations to the reality of things.

The external world is so related to the mind as to stir directly certain emotions. There is something in it for example which appeals to the æsthetic faculty. Sometimes it merely harmonizes in some of its aspects with the emotions which spring from other causes. If the mind be gay or sad, it seeks sympathy in the congenial aspects of nature. It perceives in the material world analogies which illustrate and embody spiritual relations. The material symbolises the immaterial;—the purity of the lily, for example, moral purity; the raging of a storm, the unrest of a troubled mind. Such analogies are real, though differing essentially from scientific analogies.

Though the mind under emotion naturally seeks sympathy in congenial aspects of nature, it has also the power of so representing the external world as to assimilate it to its own condition. The ordinary appearance of things, or that which they present to the purely intellectual perception, is thus moulded into conformity with every strong

passion. The mind when stirred by emotion rejects all intellectual considerations which are not congenial to that emotion, and exaggerates those which are; so that the appearance of nature to the mind under emotion varies according to the nature of the emotion, and in every instance differs more or less from the true appearance. Not only therefore does the merely intellectual investigation of nature not embrace the whole aspect which it presents; but it seems even opposed to the emotional view. The mind under emotion believes the false appearances which are due to its own condition, and which vary according to that condition to be true representations of external objects. It perceives no contradiction between the false and the true appearances, because the considerations that would demonstrate the contradiction are kept completely out of view. An object may be associated in the mind with its true appearance, or that which it presents to the pure intellect, but the power of this association to recall it is opposed by emotion, the true appearance being less congenial to the emotion than the false. The two aspects are not opposed to each other, only one being present to the mind; and this one is therefore accepted as true, for the time at least. We call the intellectual aspect the true one because it does not vary and is acknowledged by all, whereas the emotional aspect varies with the nature of the emotion, and it is highly probable that no two

individuals under emotion would agree in giving precisely the same representation of a natural object or event. The false appearance is just the true one seen through various disturbing media.

Emotion then transforms nature, and produces illusions which are firmly credited. When the real nature of phenomena is unknown, no representation can be too extravagant provided it gratify emotion. The imagination may revel without restraint where there is little knowledge. Scientific pursuits not only accustom the mind to view nature in its intellectual aspect alone, but the knowledge to which they lead makes it more difficult for the mind to credit the false appearances which its emotions produce. The more familiar we are with the scientific representation of an object or event, the greater will be the difficulty of entertaining false representations ; and of false representations those only will be accepted (even under the influence of strong emotion) which are not violently opposed to the true. The view of providence which we have given, directs attention chiefly to the intellectual relations of things, and is therefore liable to the same objections as exclusive scientific study. It excludes the cultivation of our emotional nature, and even opposes it, inasmuch as the scientific representation of nature cannot well co-exist with the emotional representation. "For most men," says Ruskin, "an ignorant enjoyment is better than an informed one :



it is better to conceive the sky as a blue dome than as a dark cavity, and the cloud as a golden throne than a slaty mist. I much question whether any one who knows optics, however religious he may be, can feel in equal degree the pleasure or reverence which an unlettered peasant may feel at the sight of a rainbow. And it is mercifully thus ordained, since the law of life for a finite being, with respect to the works of an infinite one, must be always an infinite ignorance. We cannot fathom the mystery of a single flower, nor is it intended that we should ; but that the pursuit of science should constantly be stayed by the love of beauty, and accuracy of knowledge by tenderness of emotion.” \*

The naturalistic view of providence does not necessarily exclude the emotional contemplation of nature. The reason which we perceive in nature is regarded as a small part of the manifested intelligence of God. The feeling which we attribute to natural objects is reflected from ourselves. In primitive times this reflected emotion was supposed to be an independent attribute of the external object, which was believed to embody a spirit by whom the emotion was displayed. This animation of nature which was expressed by a belief in invisible powers ruling the material world is now concentrated in the one infinite Power. Man, as we have said, is a part of creation, but it is through

\* Modern Painters, Vol. iii.

him that God reveals Himself; and through the rest of creation only so far as it calls into action his spiritual being. The reason we perceive in nature reveals the divine reason; the emotions we feel and which we blend with nature, mentally transforming it that it may minister to them, are the only revelations we can have of the corresponding attributes of God, which we may suppose to be in a similar way blended with the works of creation. Nature will thus be to us a manifestation of the divine love as well as intelligence. There will be this difference however, that to the calm eye of reason the true appearance of things will never vary, while the emotional aspect of nature will vary according to the nature and intensity of our feelings. We are justified therefore in directing attention chiefly to the laws of nature as the exposition to God's providence; for though there are other grounds of belief than evidence, it is the most permanent and the most susceptible of progress. Though we insist chiefly on this, we wish to exclude no views but those which, pretending to be based on evidence, are found to receive no support from it. The beliefs produced by emotion are true to those persons who are under emotion, and are not to be wholly discarded because they cannot be reconciled with reason in our calmer hours.

The last objection we shall notice is, that the government of the world by natural laws is op-

posed to the belief in the efficacy of prayer. The object of prayer is to influence the divine mind to benefit the supplicant; and the favour thus obtained is shown in the supernatural disposal of certain events. We may desire the removal of certain evils to which we are exposed, or the enjoyment of favours which we do not possess, and which we have no hope of possessing except in answer to prayer. The natural course of things does not fulfil our desires, for if it did prayer would be unnecessary; but God can interfere with natural sequences, and may be moved to do so on our behalf, if we appeal to Him to aid us. When there is strong reliance on the promises of God to answer prayer with a clear perception of the Divine Omnipotence, there is no limit to belief in its efficacy. "Luther," for example, "believed, that *nothing could be refused to his earnest supplication*; and accordingly he declares, that it required only that *he should sincerely ask for the destruction of the world, to precipitate the advent of the last day.*"\* It is alleged that the efficacy and duty of prayer are almost universally acknowledged, and that this belief is to be traced to the constitution of human nature. The providential administration of the world by natural law is incompatible with this belief, and is therefore an inadequate representation of the manner in which God acts towards mankind.

\* Sir W. Hamilton's Discussions, *note*, p. 521.

Various attempts have been made to reconcile the doctrine of interference in answer to prayer with the universality and immutability of law. One explanation given by Dr Chalmers is, that the interposition is merely apparent,—that there is really no interruption to natural sequences, and that the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer merely adds “another law of nature to those that have been formerly observed.”\* This explanation does not reconcile two conflicting views, but merely sacrifices one of them. It renounces the doctrine of interference, and reduces prayer and its answer to the level of a natural sequence. This assumed connexion must therefore be investigated by the ordinary canons of induction; but we need scarcely say that no attempt has ever been made to establish its truth on a scientific basis, and that it is opposed to all natural analogies. Every effect depends on antecedents, and we are asked whether prayer may not be one of these antecedents or necessary conditions. All we can say is that mental phenomena apart from bodily interference have never been known to influence physical results, when these results can be subjected to a rigorous investigation, and we have no reason to believe that they affect results which cannot be calculated and which appear to us fortuitous. Besides, this view is fatal to the ordinary conception of prayer. If prayer produced its fulfilment as a natural sequence, the ef-

\* Natural Theology, Select Works, p. 439.

fect would of course be attributed to its real cause—the act of prayer, and not to the interposition of the Being whose aid is invoked, and who would have no discretionary power to refuse.

Another explanation has been given which admits the fact of interposition in answer to prayer, but holds that the visible sequences of nature are never interrupted,—the interposition taking place in such a manner as to be safe from human observation. The line of natural causes which bring about an event may exhibit no indication of interference, so far as we are able to trace it; but the line does not terminate at the limit of our observation, and the interference may have taken place beyond that point. This view represents the interposition as taking place not in answer to prayer, but in anticipation of it. This difficulty (if it be considered a difficulty) may be overcome by representing the interposition to be made not beyond our observation in time, but beyond it in space, thus producing collateral influences which when they come within the range of our vision are seen operating according to natural laws to effect the desired result; or the interposition may be assumed to take place amidst the arcana of nature into which science has never penetrated. This explanation does not meet the difficulty. It shows how interference may take place without being observed, but does not attempt to reconcile it with law. Interference is not the less real, that it is unobserved,

and is equally incompatible with the established order of things when represented as taking place at a remote period or locality, as when it is believed to be immediate and direct.

In another solution frequently given, interpositions are dispensed with, and it is held that when the present constitution of things was established, provision was made for the accomplishment of the desires of the faithful by the natural course of events. This view represents man as praying for divine aid which was provided "when God settled the constitution of the world and set all its parts in order." It introduces the dispute about the rival claims of necessity and free-will—a dispute which has divided the world since the dawn of speculation. If the answer is foreseen and predetermined, is not also the prayer? How can an event be foreseen which is not the result of natural sequences, but springs from a self-determining independent source? It is answered that though everything is preordained by God, it is still our duty to pray, for if we refuse we will find that the thing we desire is not provided,—the pre-arrangement having depended on the contingent though foreseen circumstance of the prayer being offered. God also may foreknow human action though it is self-originating and independent of all antecedents, because His foreknowledge is not, like ours, based on computation. We predict or foreknow an eclipse, for example, because we are acquainted with the laws

which govern the motions of the heavenly bodies, and these laws are invariable; but we cannot suppose that God arrives at the knowledge of future events by a similar method. As finite creatures, we may be unable to form any conception of the Divine foreknowledge, and it may be as incorrect to represent it as based on intuition as on computation. Human action may, therefore, be foreknown by God without our supposing it to be, like material results, the necessary sequence of some antecedent. The circumstances which naturally call forth prayer are pre-determined by God, but this may be done and the will nevertheless left free. This view may be satisfactory to some minds, but it seems to us irreconcilable with the common conception of prayer. According to this view the answer to prayer is a part of the course of nature, so that we could not conceive it changed without representing the whole system to be different from what it is; and if the parts were different, the laws which govern the whole would be different. It is, however, from this very course of nature that we wish to be delivered by prayer. The natural sequences we observe would, we are convinced, be adverse to our interests, and therefore we pray that God would interfere with them on our behalf. If the answer to prayer came in the natural course of events, we could never wish the laws by which these events are determined to be superseded or violated. Prayer necessarily implies interference;

and it may be said that God does interfere in answer to prayer, but that the interference took place in the beginning in accordance with the divine foreknowledge, and that the answer is part of the natural course of things as thus originally constituted. But interference is irreconcilable with the doctrine of providence by natural law, at whatever time we may suppose it to have taken place. It seems absurd to represent God as first contriving a system and then modifying the original design to adapt it to certain contingencies.

Mr Mansel, as we have already seen, admits the existence of general law and special interposition, holding them to be inadequate as speculative truths "to represent the absolute manner in which God works in His providence, but necessary, as regulative truths to govern men's conduct in this life." If the evidence for both were equally good, we should be bound to accept both, even though they appeared to us contradictory. Both are inadequate because they represent God according to finite conceptions; but they are not to be rejected on that account, for all representations of God are liable to the same objection. We must not, however, overlook the fact that belief in the universality of natural law and belief in divine interposition rest on very different foundations. The doctrine of divine interposition is generally opposed to that of unchangeableness of His divine nature. "God is not wrought upon and changed by our prayers; for



with Him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning.”\* To this it is replied that the conception of unchangeableness implies relation to time, and is, therefore, an imperfect representation of the divine nature. There is no reason why the doctrine of interposition should be subordinated to what must be admitted to be a finite and therefore inadequate representation of a divine attribute. We do not, therefore, reject the doctrine of interposition because it seems to us inconsistent with our conception of the divine nature, but because it appears to be opposed to the universality of natural laws without having any support from scientific evidence; whereas the fact of the universality of natural law is based upon scientific induction. Interposition may be true and yet inconsistent with unchangeableness, for we can point to existing phenomena which are equally inconsistent with other attributes; but we are bound to reject it when we find that, instead of according with our observation, it is opposed to the universality of natural law; for we have no reason to suppose that this is an imperfect conception of the course of nature, as unchangeableness is an inadequate representation of a divine attribute.

The belief in the efficacy of prayer, considered apart from revelation, rests on the strength of our emotions, and not upon scientific induction. What we ardently long for, we readily believe we may

\* Dr Leechman, quoted by G. Combe in *Constitution of Man*.

obtain. Desire is proportioned to the intensity of the emotions which produce it; and the stronger the desire, the greater is our confidence in its fulfilment. "This is the nature of human passion, that, when vehement, it cannot conceive that its will is not to be fulfilled." When under the influence of strong desire, the mind is blind to the obstacles which stand in the way of its realization. It does not reason on the natural means by which our wishes may be attained, for strong emotion is not favourable to the exercise of reason. Besides, the natural means of accomplishing our desires may be unknown to us, or may be found ineffectual. They are also slow in their operation, and strong desire demands immediate gratification. When it is believed that God is accessible to us,—that He listens to our cries, and is all-powerful to interfere with the course of nature on our behalf, desire readily takes the form of prayer. It fastens at once upon this conviction, because it fully meets its requirements. Passion demands gratification, and the mind, in its search for the means by which it may be supplied, accepts those which are felt to be most certain and immediate. Belief is essential to prayer. There can be no genuine prayer without the conviction that God can, and in all probability will, answer it. It has been held by some that prayer is not designed to effect any change upon God, but merely to strengthen good dispositions in ourselves. Prayer without belief

in its efficacy would be mere folly or hypocrisy, and could never lead to self-improvement. The longing for the possession of something which our feelings prompt us to desire would remain a mere craving, and would never take the form of prayer, unless we believed we could influence one who has it in his power to aid us. There must at least be a temporary conviction. "When Lear says, 'Nature, hear! dear goddess, hear!' his passion will not believe but that there is a hearer and executor of its curse; and it imagines nature capable of hearing." \* The influence of emotion over conviction is here seen not only in its producing the belief that some one has the power of executing its purposes, but in giving life and personality to a material system.

We may not be able to justify our emotional beliefs at the bar of our reason. As we have already said, the appearance presented by things seen through the haze of emotion is very different from that which they exhibit when seen through the clear and cold atmosphere of intellect, though both aspects are believed in at the time. Our emotional beliefs, when examined after the feeling has passed away, may be rejected as irrational; but they are entertained as long as the feeling lasts, the knowledge with which they are inconsistent being excluded. We may not be able to understand how our desires can be satisfied without

\* Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. 72, p. 146.

using the means naturally fitted to accomplish them. If the natural course of things be regarded by us as a manifestation of the divine intelligence, the conception of interference which prayer implies cannot be entertained. In our cool hours of reflection it will appear absurd to represent material objects as responsive, though in the heat of passion we acknowledge no impossibilities. In prayer, we shut out the world and the conditions it imposes upon the gratification of our desires, or we triumph over it through the divine omnipotence. On reflection we cannot conceal the difficulties we encounter in supposing the course of nature interfered with. We will find it impossible to reconcile our emotional belief with the convictions of our reason; but the same difficulty occurs in every case of emotional belief.

We have already referred to the influence which knowledge exercises over the conceptions we form when under the influence of emotion. We will find that knowledge also tends to restrict the subjects of our petitions. The more extended and exact our knowledge becomes, the more difficult will it be for the mind under emotion to retain only what harmonizes with its condition and to resist the force of firmly established intellectual associations. Fluctuating states of emotion have little influence over our conceptions of well-known uniform and periodic phenomena. We are so accustomed to this permanence of some natural oc-

currences that we cannot believe them to be interrupted even when under the influence of the strongest desire. There are few events that we can definitely predict. The more we know however of the laws which regulate phenomena, the better are we able to determine the probability of the occurrence of an event, and the more we free ourselves from the dominion of feeling. The more clearly we perceive that phenomena are determined by law, even when we are ignorant of the laws involved, the more difficult is it for us to conceive them to be different from what they are, their antecedents remaining unchanged. The more difficulty we have in conceiving them different the more unreasonable will it appear to petition God to make them different. No one prays that the sun may set after its wonted time ; that the tides may cease to ebb or flow ; or that he or his friends may be exempted from death. We would think it foolish to ask for the suspension of a general law, or for any interference with results which we know to be regulated by law. We have never known such things to happen in all our experiences, and we are cognisant of the difficulties which the conception of interference with natural law involves ; and consequently we think it foolish to ask for them, even though placed in circumstances which excite ardent desire. As science teaches us that events once regarded as fortuitous are under the dominion of laws, its progress must

tend to restrict our petitions. It effects this also in another way. We ask God to do for us what we cannot readily at least do ourselves. But science extends our power over nature. What we formerly asked God to do for us, we learn to accomplish ourselves. We do not pray that our churches may be protected from lightning, for we know that we can protect them by a conductor. It would now be considered impious to ask to be relieved from consequences which might have been avoided had we used the necessary means.

It has been said that man instinctively feels that the sphere of prayer is within the limits of contingent events. But it is not difficult to explain why we pray for contingent events alone without calling in the aid of instinct. We have no difficulty in praying for such things as we have before experienced, and which, so far as we know, may or may not happen again. We are ignorant of the conditions which precede, and we may suppose the event to be such as we wish it without perceiving that any violation of law is necessary. It is very different with an event which we can predict, for in that case we see at once that we cannot obtain the object of our desire without the suspension of natural law. This knowledge cannot be excluded, and its tendency is to cause us to limit our wishes, by the necessities of our condition. No doubt there is no real difference between contingent and predictable events; the

apparent difference depends wholly on our knowledge. It has been said that man prays "only that things may be granted or averted, which, in millions of ways, he sees by experience admit of either alternative."\* In apparently the same circumstances, we have observed various and even opposite results to take place, and when the circumstances recur we have no difficulty in supposing one or other of these results again to happen, and have no reason to expect one rather than another. If however the exact conditions were known to us, and also the laws involved, we could tell why one result happened at one time and a different result at another time. A number of alternatives are possible when the conditions are only apparently the same as in former cases in which different results have been experienced. But however many alternatives may appear possible to us, we know that in each case there can be only one result, for the same antecedents cannot produce two different results either of which may happen. Every event, however contingent it may appear to us, is as certain to occur in the conditions in which it does occur, as those events which have never been known to vary. Our power of prediction is exactly proportioned to our knowledge and the facility of applying it. Did we know the exact conditions preceding some particular event in which we are interested; and were we able to trace the effects of these ante-

\* Selections from the Correspondence of R. E. H. Greyson, Esq.

cedents, the event would cease to be fortuitous, and would consequently be placed beyond the sphere of prayer.

Even though we are assured that fortuitous events are as strictly the result of natural laws as the most constant phenomena, we have much less difficulty in supposing them interfered with. Were an event which is the obvious logical result of a well-known general law not to occur, the contradiction would be at once observed. When a probable event turns out to be different from what was anticipated, we have no reason to suppose that the natural course of things has been interfered with. We may have made a wrong estimate of the probability. In praying for an event which we know only as contingent, the necessity of interference with a natural law is not thought of, and our emotional belief is not opposed.

So far as contingent events are concerned, scientific knowledge will never altogether destroy emotional beliefs. However extended the domain of science may become, there will always be an unexplored region lying beyond; and even were our knowledge of natural law complete, the means of applying it to regulate our conduct would in the great majority of cases be wanting. A general belief in the uniformity of natural relations is too abstract a conception to influence the emotional belief that some contingent event may be brought



about by direct interposition. It is only in cases where we cannot think of interposition without perceiving at the same time its obvious inconsistency with some known physical law that scientific knowledge is fatal to emotional belief. When we suppose a contingent event to have been brought about by direct interference, being ignorant of the natural causes involved, we cannot point to the exact place or time when or where the interference has taken place ; and though we know in a general way that there has been some break in the natural sequences in order to constitute it an interference, the event viewed by itself does not necessarily imply a breach of uniformity. Emotion, in producing belief in the case of contingent events, has merely to contend against the weak intellectual association of the general principle of uniformity. We should not think of praying for the suspension of what is obviously the result of a natural law, but we offer up prayers in our churches for rain, for we may suppose the prayer answered without being at all reminded that any breach of natural sequences is involved in the petition. Were the science of meteorology so far advanced that the weather could be calculated with the same certainty as the motions of the heavenly bodies, prayers for rain would be no longer offered.

It has appeared to many to be an extraordinary fact that scientific knowledge has failed in many instances to extinguish superstitious beliefs.

It would have extinguished them, had they been founded on evidence alone. Though science may never altogether succeed in preventing emotional beliefs being entertained, it always occupies a position of hostility. It is triumphant in the case of obvious uniformities, and is not without very considerable influence when the probability of events can be ascertained with some degree of certainty.

We are aware that great dislike is entertained to such views of prayer as the above, because it is feared that the cause of religion may suffer from them. We believe this will be found to be altogether a mistake. Religion may appear to us to be identified with the conception of interference, but the two things have no essential connexion; and when the stage of progress is attained in which the conception of interference is dismissed as altogether unintelligible, religion will be associated with new views which science will not disturb. Desire formerly ending in prayer may take the form of pursuit, without any injury to religion. There is nothing essentially religious in asking God to work a miracle on our behalf.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MORAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD.

As God can be comprehended by us only through our own consciousness, our conception of Him will correspond to our moral and intellectual development. The character of this conception is therefore an index of the progress in civilization of those who entertain it, if due allowance is made for the conservative tendency to adhere to opinions after they are found on reflection to be incompatible with existing habits of thought. Our conception of the divine government must also accord with our experience of earthly rule. Indeed, it is believed by some that there existed originally no distinction between the two.\* The aboriginal God was the primitive chief whose power was so superior to that of his fellow-men, and so inexplicable to them, that they believed him to differ essentially from themselves, and paid him divine honours. His rule was divine, and none other was known. When he died, his descendants ruled in his name

\* See Herbert Spencer's Essays, p. 113.

and by his authority. The government was still divine, but it was conducted by deputy. In the course of time the superiority of the rulers came to be regarded with less wonder, and accordingly they gradually lost their sacred character. The original conception of the God-King was not lost: the sanctity which was withdrawn almost entirely from the secular ruler was ascribed exclusively to him, and the distinction between human government and the divine was definitely established. As the conception of deity became more abstract, his authority increased. His commands constituted a code of morals, interpreted by the priesthood and enforced with all the sanctions of religion. His government, though less palpable than human rule, was felt to be equally real, and the mystery in which it was involved, tended to strengthen its authority. The god ruled, though invisible; his commands were real, though handed down by tradition, or enunciated by a select few who professed to be in direct communication with him, and were enforced by judgments in this world and threatened punishments in the next. These ideas are developed out of the necessities of social life. Political rule is necessarily the type of the divine government; and the conception of divine government having been once acquired, nature is interpreted in consistency with it. We expect that nature will reward the obedient with material benefits, and punish the disobedient with temporal evils.

Approaching it with this preconception, we see much that appears to confirm it. Our observation is biassed by the hypothesis with which we are prepossessed, and which was derived from other considerations. We see only what we expect to find, and disregard all the rest. A single instance which impresses the imagination will sometimes overcome a great amount of adverse experience.

The government of God is thus believed to be upheld by the advantages and calamities which happen to men in this life, and which are believed to be immediately and arbitrarily inflicted with reference to obedience or disobedience of the divine commands. The conception of divine government is not formed by an inductive study of the relations of natural events; but having been developed out of the primitive social condition of mankind, nature is interpreted in its light. Nature, however, does not always satisfy the hypothesis or fulfil our expectations. A calm and unprejudiced observation fails to establish an invariable connexion between all moral and physical evils. The conception, however, being firmly rooted in the mind, and being supposed essential to the very existence of morality, is retained long after its incongruity with the established order of things is perceived. We ascribe a certain character to the Deity, and we expect to find that nature will correspond with it. In imagination we form a perfect realization of this character, and when under the influence of

emotion, our views of nature are distorted, by what Ruskin calls the pathetic fallacy, in order that they may correspond with our ideal representation.

We shall now proceed to point out some important modifications which it is necessary to make upon the spontaneous conceptions that are formed of God as a moral governor, in order to accommodate them to the scientific knowledge which has since been acquired regarding the constitution of nature. We have to encounter, at the very outset, the difficulty arising from the fact that writers on morals have given different and conflicting theories of the nature and grounds of obligation. It will suffice to refer to the two principal theories, and to point out in a few words their bearing on our conceptions of God as a moral governor. According to one of these theories the morality of an action is perceived by an intuitive faculty, sometimes called a moral sense; according to the other, it is determined by the consequences of the actions as they affect the general happiness. Were we to adopt the former of these theories, we would have to consider this moral sense as a divine creation in the soul of man, and not merely as developed in consequence of his being possessed of certain faculties, and placed in circumstances favourable to that development. Being thus viewed as an endowment conferred directly and immediately by God, we would require to consider the constitution of nature

as an independent existence, in order to ascertain how far the laws which prevail in it are in harmony with man's moral constitution. If conduct, prompted by the lower propensities and uncontrolled by the higher emotions, lead to consequences as beneficial to the individual and to society as conduct proceeding from the highest motives, the obligation to follow the dictates of conscience would be unaffected; but it would be felt that there was a want of harmony between the constitution of the human mind and of external nature. If, on the contrary, it were shown that correct moral conduct leads to beneficial consequences and immoral conduct to hurtful consequences, virtue would receive an additional sanction,—being found to be not only essential to mental satisfaction, but linked to the harmony of natural laws.

We cannot attempt here to establish the great fact that the external world is constituted in harmony with the supremacy of virtue, and that man's highest well-being is inconsistent with the practice of vice. It will suffice to give one or two illustrations. Morality is in harmony with the conditions of physical health. Correct moral conduct is not of itself sufficient to insure health, nor does immorality necessarily lead to disease, but a due regulation of the appetites and affections is favourable to health, while immoral conduct often leads directly to the infringement of conditions essen-

tial to health, and also indirectly by inducing poverty and degradation.

Again, take trade as an example. This is a natural institution essential to human progress, if not existence. It secures mutual benefit by the mutual exchange of commodities. The great motive which induces men to trade is the desire of gain, and on this principally the important science of political economy is founded. A certain amount of knowledge of this science is essential to success; but it is no less necessary that this selfish desire be directed and restrained by conscience. Without this, the benefit which legitimate trade should confer on others is apt to be forgotten in the eager pursuit of self-aggrandisement. The merchant is tempted to run undue risks in the hope of quickly amassing wealth; and prompted by a strong propensity, he disregards prudence, exposes the property of others to loss, and, unless relieved by some happy turn of fortune upon which when he finds himself in difficulty he is too apt to depend, becomes bankrupt at last. There can be no doubt that a great proportion of the disasters that occur in the commercial world are owing, not so much to unavoidable circumstances or even to ignorance of the principles on which trade can be safely conducted, as to this disregard of the higher sentiments in the conduct of business.

Again, were we to consider the conduct of na-



tions, we should find that their prosperity was intimately connected with their morality. Knowledge here also is required to enable governments to promote the best interests of the nations; but while they may err from ignorance, they are greatly more liable to err from following selfish courses and by perpetrating injustice. No political scheme will be found to be expedient which is founded on wrong. It requires but a slight acquaintance with history to satisfy one that almost all the disasters which have befallen nations may be ascribed to departure from that constitution of things with which alone providence has joined true happiness and success.

God is thus shown to be a moral governor, not merely because He has implanted in man a moral sense and a feeling of satisfaction in the performance of duty; but because nature is so constituted in relation to conscience that beneficial consequences are attached to well-doing and hurtful consequences to wrong-doing.

The other theory with some modifications is the one we prefer, and the adoption of it would somewhat alter the above view of God as a moral governor. We are disposed to regard the conscience as a growth, rather than a creation, though we do not think that the rules of morality are based upon a mere intellectual perception of their utility. The useful embraces more than the moral. Every action that is beneficial is not

therefore moral, and thus morality, not being co-extensive with utility, must imply something additional.

Besides, it is not true historically that moral rules are adopted because they are ascertained to be advantageous. Men act spontaneously before they reason on the consequences of their actions; and when these spontaneous actions are uniform, and are sympathized in by others, a rule of action is established. Such actions are prompted by sentiment alone, and it is not necessary that the sentiment be common to the race. It may be peculiar to the community amongst whom the rule founded upon it prevails. The rule itself may become law, and be rendered obligatory by the punishment which law inflicts; or it may be enforced simply by the disapprobation and dislike of the community which would be incurred by disregarding it. It may be said that affections are not moral feelings. They may not be so primarily and in themselves, but they lie at the foundation of all morality. They become moral when sympathized in by others, and when the actions to which they give rise are sanctioned by punishment or the public disapprobation. Some of these affections are so strong, and the circumstances which call them forth so uniform, that they belong to, and in great part constitute, the morality of all times and countries. The consequences of acting on moral rules founded on sentiment may subsequently be

attended to, and the observation of these consequences may tend to the confirmation or modification of the rule, according as they are found to be beneficial or otherwise; but the rule is often established before the consequences are studied. Utility may be the standard by which the rule must ultimately be tested, but it is not the consideration which led to the adoption of the rule. The feelings on which some moral rules are founded may not justify these rules. It is not sufficient to say that so many entertain these feelings and approve of actions prompted by them. If the feelings are to be their own justification, we assume that they are infallible. But how are we to be assured that this is the case? It may be said, because they are natural and universal. But universality cannot be claimed for all moral feelings, and rules of morality are often founded on sentiments which are extremely local and even directly opposed to those entertained in other places. Are we to assume that no feelings are right, but such as are universal? Our feelings, besides, are not ineradicable and unchangeable sentiments which were implanted in us at the first, and which are therefore authoritative. They are the product of the circumstances which have surrounded us from infancy, of the training to which we have been subjected acting upon the mental capabilities originally given us. They are natural to us in the circumstances, but how are we to know that the

circumstances are favourable to the development of the higher feelings? It may be necessary to justify feelings on the ground of utility, though moral rules are formed before this test has been applied to them.

When under the influence of an emotion, we are apt to disregard the relation which the actions proceeding from it bear to our other emotions. The more the habit of reflection is developed, the more is this relation attended to, and the satisfaction which we derive from our conduct depends much upon the balance which is maintained amongst our emotions. In estimating the consequences of actions, it is necessary to take into consideration the satisfaction which is derived from the harmonious operation of the emotions, and the pain and dissatisfaction which are felt when this harmony is disturbed. We cannot therefore form a correct judgment of the utility of actions without taking into consideration the natural balance which ought to be maintained amongst the emotions. The tendency to happiness or misery, both as regards ourselves and others, depends to some extent upon this balance, and consequently also the approval or disapproval of the action. There is some difficulty in applying the test of utility, for it involves the consideration of the satisfaction derived from the exercise of the emotions. The happiness which an action bestows, both on the actor and on others, depends greatly on the development of their emo-

tional nature. One very important consequence of our actions is the effect they will have in the formation of our character, and the pursuit of this end seems to imply a knowledge of that harmonious exercise of the emotions which it is thought desirable to cultivate. Utility would therefore presuppose acquaintance with that morality of which it is itself the test. The highest form of morality is reached when spiritual perfection is sought after as an end,—when truth and justice are practised for their own sake. In this case, as in the instance of moral rules founded on sentiment, utility does not constitute morality. The fear of punishment, or of the disapproval of fellow-men, sentiment, and regard to consequences, may have been essential elements of the training by which this moral perfection has been reached ; but when once attained, these restraints are dispensed with, and the love of the good and the true is sufficient motive to virtue.

The theory of utility is very liable to be confounded with the selfish theory. In making happiness the test of morality we are apt to regard happiness in the abstract, and to identify our own happiness with that of others. Our social duties being assumed to be in harmony with our individual interests, we are disposed to regard conduct as it affects our own happiness alone. But our obligations to others may happen to be adverse to our own interests, and in this case when the good

of society is greater in amount than the individual benefit, we are bound to act according to the principle of utility, and to subordinate our interest to the general good. The morality of the action is tested by the amount of good resulting from it, even though it should imply a large amount of personal sacrifice. Such actions are prompted by our benevolent dispositions, and meet with the approval of our fellow-men. Assuming that each must be guided in his conduct by a regard to his own happiness or misery, the attempt has been made to prove that this rule is not departed from even when our duty to others compels self-sacrifice. It is said that we derive greater happiness from promoting the happiness of others than from following out our own interest to the neglect or detriment of others, and that we are therefore indulging our self-love by the exercise of benevolence. The happiness of others is an essential condition of our own happiness, and in promoting the one, we are at the same time securing the other. It may be that in doing good to others, we likewise benefit ourselves; that our own happiness is wrapped up in the happiness of our fellow-men; but it is not the case that we exercise benevolence because we thus promote our own happiness. Each emotion has its end in itself, and its indulgence gives satisfaction. When strong, it seeks for objects on which it can discharge itself, and its exercise is accompanied with intense delight. Our benevo-

lent feelings, like all our other emotions, have their satisfaction in themselves. We are not induced to indulge them because they gratify another emotion of a totally opposite character, but simply because we obtain gratification in the feelings themselves. There is no exercise of self-love in benevolence. Indeed, our selfish feelings are in general opposed by our benevolence, the strength of which may be measured by the amount of the self-denial it necessitates. There is no nice balancing before our self-love of the happiness we derive from the indulgence of benevolence, and the loss we sustain by the sacrifice of our own interests. Benevolence implies the sacrifice of self, and disinterested conduct cannot without contradiction be supposed to be due to our desire of self-indulgence. Conduct so prompted might assume the form of benevolence, but would only be selfishness in disguise.

To assume that men perform generous actions because they have weighed the amount of happiness to be derived from them, would imply that a precise estimate is made of the consequences of actions before they are entered upon. Utility does not, as we have already observed, of itself constitute morality, though it may form the standard by which it may be tested. Men perform disinterested actions solely because they are prompted by a generous and self-denying disposition, and not because they have weighed the amount of happiness conferred against the amount resigned. Morality

may be discovered afterwards to be a means to an end ; but it is not requisite to constitute morality that the agent be conscious that an end will be served. A generous disposition receives the moral approbation of mankind though there may be no distinct perception of the utility of the actions which are prompted by it. In order to constitute a moral action, there must be another element taken into consideration than the simple utility. Supposing it to be perceived that in a given action the public benefit will be greater than the individual loss, the mere perception of this would not lead to the action without the prompting of an appropriate emotion. The emotions would certainly be but a blind guide without the reason ; and the intellectual perception of utility would in most cases be inoperative without the motive power of the affections.

We have yet to speak of the sense of obligation implied in morals. Obligation presupposes an external authority by which man's liberty of action is abridged. Men are most readily and most powerfully influenced by the endurance of suffering or by the fear of it ; and accordingly we find that this has been the great instrument by which authority has been maintained.

Our fellow-men have the power of inflicting pain, and, therefore, of controlling our conduct. They are disposed to do so when injured by us. Anger, indignation, revenge, resentment are all



varieties of a common feeling universally implanted in the human mind, by which we are instigated to inflict injury in return for injury received. This feeling is observed completely dissociated from rational control in many of the inferior animals, and is manifested in the resistance they offer to any encroachment upon the conditions necessary to their existence or well-being. We observe the consistency of this instinct with the good of the race; but the animal itself acts from a blind impulse,—the resistance it offers or the injury it inflicts following the encroachment, in a manner not unlike that by which reflex action is produced by a stimulus applied to a nerve of sensation. In the child this feeling has very much of an instinctive character. Injury rouses a passion to inflict injury in return. The child does not discriminate between one kind of injury and another, but resents all alike. The result is the same, whether the injury is inflicted by an inanimate object or a sentient being. In primitive and rude states of society in which there is little organization, each for the most part pursues his own revenge, which in general is limited only by the extent of his power to inflict injury. Where the organization is more complete, an injury inflicted on one of the tribe or society is felt as if directed against the whole, and the individual in seeking his revenge has the sympathy and aid of the tribe. It is not necessary that he should himself pursue the person who has injured him in

order personally to inflict injury in return. He may resign this office to his chief or ruler, who has better means of seizing the offender and greater power to inflict injury. When revenge is thus indulged indirectly, its character necessarily suffers considerable change. It ceases to be exercised as a blind passion, having no end but its own gratification. It is now perceived that the infliction of injury in revenge for injury sustained acts as a restraint upon outrage. The chief, acting for an intelligent end, and moved by sympathy and not by passion directly roused, is enabled to regulate the amount of injury he inflicts according to the requirements of the case, doing nothing more than he deems sufficient to prevent a repetition of the offence. He makes the severity of the suffering he inflicts proportionate to the amount of injury sustained. To rude nations the "*lex talionis*" seems the most equitable. The chief thus becomes a judge, and the suffering he inflicts is punishment. There may be no written law, for the administration of justice must always precede the formation of a code of laws. The law may be simply the will of the chief. The earliest form of authority is personal, and virtue is at first simply obedience. The only external control which a child recognises is parental authority. Considerable progress must be made in civilization before regard is paid to the impersonal authority of law. The commands of the chief must not, however, be wholly arbitrary.

He is enabled to rule by possessing the sympathy of the society over which he exercises his sway; and his commands must in general be such as will obtain its approval, and conduce to its welfare. The society may thus be said to rule through its chief, though the latter apparently exercises an arbitrary sway.

Punishment by a judge is the substitute for the exercise of private vengeance. The judge ascertains that an offence has been committed, and that sufficient evidence is adduced to prove the guilt of the person accused. The punishment he orders simply takes the place of the injury the person offended is instigated to inflict in return for the injury sustained. The vindictive nature of punishment is shown in the disproportionate severity which has characterised it up to a recent period despite the general progress in civilization. When the causes which produce crime are better understood, men are led to compassionate the criminal; and their better feelings are employed in seeking to reform him. Their efforts are directed to lessen the temptations to crime and to fortify the criminal against them by improved education, rather than to revenge crime after it is committed. In this way not only is that portion of the community liable to lapse into crime benefited, but the great object of all punishment,—the protection of society, is most effectually secured. When compassion is felt for the criminal and a desire is entertained to

reform him for his own benefit and as a more effectual means of suppressing crime, the administration of justice is gradually adjusted to these more rational convictions. A change takes place in the first instance in the treatment of youthful criminals, they being more amenable to reformatory influences. Institutions are established by private benevolence for their reception, and the judge is empowered to send them to such establishments on conviction instead of punishing after the wonted manner. The restraint even of such institutions may be said to be penal, but its primary object is to permit the employment of moral training, and to remove the criminal from the influence of temptations too strong for his defective moral condition. In the treatment even of adults regard is now very generally paid to their moral improvement; and the sentence which the judge pronounces is partly penal, partly reformatory. It may be said that the function of a judge is not to reform a criminal, but to pronounce sentence according to law; yet inasmuch as the sentence has for its object the reformation of the criminal as well as his punishment, the judge so far aids in carrying out the public desire that the criminal be subjected to moral discipline with a view to reformation. The office of the judge thus assumes a different aspect as more enlightened views of crime come to be entertained, and it becomes incorrect to say that his duty is essentially and ex-

clusively to pronounce penal sentence without any consideration of motives or any regard to the reformation of the criminal. In the case of capital punishment reformation is of course precluded, but it is to be noted that it is now very rarely inflicted, whereas in comparatively recent times it was awarded for comparatively trifling offences.

The primary object of punishment being now the reformation of the criminal, its vindictive character is almost entirely overlooked; but it is nevertheless true that the administration of justice has its root and origin in the passion of revenge; and this fact is made apparent even now in the popular demand for severe retribution through law, when the passions are roused by the occurrence of some peculiarly aggravated offence.

Law does not embrace the whole field of obligation. Society restrains human action by the influence it exercises directly as well as through the government. When the injury sustained is such as at once rouses our resentment and thus instigates us to inflict injury in return, or when loss would naturally lead us to indemnify ourselves by making reprisals had we the power, it is obviously advantageous that government should undertake what we ourselves are in the first instance prompted to do. Society in fact could not exist unless the community were to exercise some restraint upon the actions of individuals. There are however many actions which are injurious and which tend

to provoke a resentment which has the sympathy of the community, though it may not proceed to the length of manifesting itself in active punishment, but may be satisfied with the expression of disapprobation or the withdrawal of good offices. The offender is not punished, but simply excommunicated. The disapprobation which certain actions call forth is however apt to assume a more active form, and when strong and sympathized in by the most influential portion of a community it may lead to a new legal enactment enforced by penalties. Society, by the disapprobation it expresses and by the obstacles it can throw in the way of an offender, acts directly as a restraint upon human action, and is thus an external authority by which certain actions are rendered obligatory. In the child and in the infancy of society, bodily pain and the fear of encountering it are the most powerful restraints upon conduct, but in manhood and in a more advanced state of civilization the disapprobation of our fellow-men and the loss of their friendship and good opinion is often felt to be a more severe form of punishment than the penalties imposed by law. So far as the great bulk of the community is concerned, these penalties are not required to secure obedience, and might be repealed without any encouragement being given to crime, being superseded by the fear of giving offence and of incurring the disapprobation of their fellow-men.

Our moral nature is developed under the influ-

ence of authority maintained by the infliction of penalties. Other motives, such as affection and respect for the authority, a perception of the utility of the conduct prescribed, and such like, become associated with the original motive, and at length almost entirely supersede it. The motives which induce a certain course of action vary according to our mental development. In infancy, for example, the pursuit of knowledge is prompted by the simple love of novelty. Our elementary knowledge of the properties of surrounding bodies is thus attained, and it is only after some progress has been made in the acquisition of knowledge that its utility is recognised. This sense of its utility then becomes an additional motive to its acquisition, and in like manner other motives, such as the spirit of emulation and the love of fame and power, cluster round and almost conceal the original source of gratification. Some may even attain a higher stage, and in the love of knowledge for its own sake find ample inducement to pursue it. So is it likewise with morals. Authority is essential to the development of the moral sentiment, but other motives cluster round and obscure this original source, until in this also the highest stage is reached in which penalties are superseded and virtue is practised for its own sake. One who has attained this position would not be less virtuous were all the penalties which both law and society inflict, abolished. He is a law to himself, and his pro-

tection against sin is the fear of wounding his own conscience. No one has ever completely attained this perfect ideal of virtue. In general the other motives to which we have referred combine more or less with the love of virtue for its own sake. In most moral theories, however, it is this stage of moral progress which is alone considered. We are told that "considered solely in itself, with no relation to any higher authority, the consciousness of a law of obligation is a fact of our mental constitution,"\* and disobedience of this law involves the conviction of sin. The highest state of progress is thus imagined to be the primitive endowment, and all moral aberration is attributed to the corruption of our original nature. If we attend to the growth of the moral sentiment in the individual and in society, it is quite possible to give a satisfactory explanation of the authority exercised by conscience without resorting to the hypothesis of an instinctive sense of obligation. It is through obedience enforced by penalty, as we have already said, that the moral faculty is developed. Certain actions are liked, and the habit of performing them is acquired, because they secure the approval of our fellow-men; while other actions are disliked because they incur their disapprobation and subject us to penalties. An association is thus formed between sentiment and action, and the cause which led to the association is afterwards neglected. The sen-

\* Mansel's Bampton Lectures, p. 111.



timent is now determined by the association, and the sense of obligation may be retained, though the penalty which constitutes the obligation is wholly left out of consideration. Other sentiments become associated with the sense of obligation, and thus the authority of conscience is increased while its character is at the same time changed. Man is thus a law to himself, but he can only become so by passing through that stage of moral progress in which he experiences the penalties which are inflicted by external authority. Though a law to himself, his will and his duty are not identical. The law which he obeys is determined for him, though in obeying it he is not consciously subject to any external authority. There must however be a tacit reference to authority, and the penalties by which it is sustained; for otherwise there could be no sense of obligation at all.

The authority of conscience can thus be explained without having recourse to the hypothesis of a primitive sense of obligation, and indeed it is difficult to conceive how such an intuition is possible. Obligation is enforced by punishment, and we cannot understand how there can be any sense of obligation prior to all experience of the penalties that constitute it. The restraint is external, and all that belongs to the mind itself from the first is the susceptibility of being acted upon by it. Until we experience this restraint, we can have no knowledge of any limit to our liberty of action. The

case is exactly reversed by the advocates of an intuitive sense of obligation. Instead of deriving the sense of obligation from the experience of an external authority, they assume it to be intuitive; and from this intuition they deduce the existence of an external authority. "We are thus compelled," says Mansel, "by the consciousness of moral obligation, to assume the existence of a moral Deity, and to regard the absolute standard of right and wrong as constituted by the nature of that Deity."\* Conscience is recognised as possessing authority, but it can only have it "as a *Law* emanating from a *Lawgiver*."

If we are endowed with a sense of obligation simply, without any intuitive knowledge of the external authority by which it is enforced, there will be some difficulty in accounting for the connexion between sin and suffering so universally recognised. If an action is felt to be obligatory previous to any experience of penalties, the association between disobedience and suffering may be formed by experience, but this experience cannot account for our consciousness that the suffering is deserved. If however we attend to the development of conscience, the connexion is at once apparent. An injury calls forth revenge from the very nature of the passion, and thus an authority is established by which our liberty of action is restrained. Our susceptibility to pain, and our dread of encounter-

\* Bampton Lectures, p. 112.

ing it, especially when we are ignorant of the amount to which we may be subjected, produce an aversion to such actions as will certainly expose us to it, and thus lay the foundation of conscience or a sense of moral obligation.

According to the theory of an intuitive conscience, we have two independent things adapted to each other. We have a moral sense within and a constitution of nature without, adapted to promote the well-being of those who follow the right, and to punish those who do wrong. God is a moral governor, because from His sovereign will or from His own nature He has established certain laws, and has so constituted the external world that it shall enforce them. According to the theory that represents conscience as a growth, these two things cannot properly be said to be mutually independent, for the conduct which we come to regard as obligatory is determined to some extent by the circumstances in which we are placed. In attending to the conditions essential to the development of conscience, however, we must not overlook the susceptibility of being influenced by these conditions. Conscience could not be developed in man at all had he not been susceptible of pain inflicted by his fellow-men under the instigation of revenge; and its highest form could never be attained, had he not been possessed of certain emotions, affections, sympathies, and antipathies. It is by the mutual action and reaction of mind and external

conditions, that moral rules are established. We can have no conception of morality apart from the conditions in which it may be exercised. There is no abstract moral rule distinct from the moral perceptions of mankind. If we represent God as possessed of a moral nature, we can only do so by identifying it with our own. We attribute to Him the highest ideal form of morality which we can conceive; and though we are painfully conscious that we fall short of this ourselves, yet the ideal is not an intuitive perception of some abstract immutable law, but simply expresses a knowledge of duty which we have not yet in all cases been able to reduce to practice. If we suppose that there are "eternal principles of right and wrong," which "are modified in relation to this present life," we can never find out what these eternal principles are, for we know only their modifications.

Conscience is no less a gift of God that it is a growth and not an intuitive faculty. God has so constituted the human mind and placed it in such circumstances that a moral nature is developed in it. Conscience is a divine institution, even though its growth can be historically traced. Language is a divine gift, but to constitute it such it is not necessary to suppose that the very words of the primitive language were miraculously communicated to man. It sufficed to endow him with the capacity of speech and to place him in a situation favourable to the exercise of his powers. Con-

science is the gift of God in its imperfect condition as well as in its state of highest development. In the earlier conditions of society the selfish emotions are the most powerfully stimulated. The exercise of these emotions produces a state of things which affords scope for the development of higher principles. Each condition has a restraining power suited to it, and this restraint secures a condition favourable to the development of the generous emotions. The highest condition is that in which regard is paid to the greatest happiness of our fellow-men ; and the nearer this condition is approached, it becomes the more obvious that the good of the whole is consistent with individual well-being. In early conditions of civilization what is for the good of the whole may bring suffering to individuals. The few and the weak are sacrificed for the benefit of the many and the strong. Thousands are destroyed by war, but by means of war the nation is formed and a higher civilization attained. Manifold and grievous are the evils of slavery, but through it combined industry is rendered possible, and the way is prepared for the wonders which have been accomplished by free and remunerated labour. As the organization of society is advanced, the higher emotions are brought into activity, and the good of the individual becomes more and more consistent with the general progress. The full advantage of correct moral conduct can only be attained when

society has reached a high standard. Conduct in advance of the age does not receive the public sympathy, nor the advantages that attend conduct in harmony with the public feeling. In a state of society in which success can only be attained by chicanery, the most unscrupulous will be the most successful. When every merchant adulterates his goods the honest man may be unable to make a livelihood. The public heaps its rewards on those who gratify its desires, and persecutes those whose conduct is a standing rebuke. But a state of society which is disadvantageous to the upright man is one of unmitigated evil. The full advantage of correct moral conduct is only attained when the general morality approximates that of the most advanced individual. The conditions which God has appointed, and in which he has placed mankind, necessarily tend to the full development of their moral nature ; and when the highest stage of morality is reached by the community, the evils incident to a state of development for the most part disappear.

We have supported the opinion that the providence of God is expressed by natural law, and is understood only so far as law can be traced. Natural law is a revelation to us of the divine will. Moral laws however differ from physical laws in some respects, and amongst others in this, that they do not possess the same degree of certainty. They are by no means optional, for they

are determined by the nature of man and by external conditions. But though morality has a natural basis, there is practically no infallible standard of morality. Those who believe in the existence of a moral sense capable of discriminating between right and wrong must admit that it is not invariably to be relied on. As the moral judgments of individuals are not infallible, no aggregate body of men who happen to hold the same maxims of morality and impose them on others can lay claim to infallibility. No number of fallible units can constitute an infallible aggregate. This liability to err is not confined to the practice of morality alone. It may be said that though no man is free from error in conduct, yet a certain number may agree in recognising a perfect moral code. It is true that the knowledge of what is right may be entertained by those who have not the ability invariably to act upon it, that the rules of morality recognised by society may be in advance of the practice of the individual members of society ; but the moral code of even the most advanced society is not necessarily perfect. In proof of the great diversity in moral judgments, we may appeal, not merely to conduct which invariably falls short of the ideal conception of virtue, but to the moral rules which have been deemed obligatory amongst different peoples and in different ages. This diversity amounts in some instances to a total inversion of moral principle, the

virtue of one age becoming the vice of another. It does not follow however that we have no manifestation at all of the will of God in morals as in physics because the same certainty is not attainable. There may be a science of approximate generalizations as well as of definitely established laws. The most important of the moral laws are based upon necessities so urgent and so general that they are universally recognised amongst mankind. As nature is a system of parts, mutually and uniformly related, rules founded upon a limited experience are frequently found to hold universally. No department of nature is opposed to another, — a principle of mutual adaptation runs through the whole. As civilization advances, the beneficial consequences of moral rules are found to exceed greatly those which first led to their establishment.

The moral rules founded on the emotions are less certain and uniform. The development of the emotional nature varies much in different individuals and in different ages. Its condition however is far from being arbitrary. God has implanted certain emotions in the mind, and their development depends very much on the circumstances in which men are placed and on the social relations that prevail. Some emotions may be called into more lively exercise than others, and moral rules may in consequence be recognised which are inconsistent with the harmonious exercise of all



the emotions. Reflection tends to remove the diversity in moral codes to which this gives rise, and to establish rules which<sup>as</sup> become uniform in proportion to the degree of intelligence with which they accord. Reflection does this by bringing about the conditions that are favourable to the harmonious development of the emotions, and by restraining the indulgence of sentiment by considerations of utility. A majority entertaining a sentiment peculiar to themselves cannot impose a rule founded on that sentiment upon the rest of the community without unduly restricting individual liberty, but reflection on the consequences of the rule and its relation to the rest of morality tends to produce uniformity by leading either to the abandonment of the rule which the majority have hitherto insisted on, or to its acceptance by the minority.

Many moral rules partially entertained are founded on sentiment and maintained by tradition alone. They may be based for example on antipathies for which no reason can now be given,—not because the antipathy was at first wholly arbitrary, but because it has continued from habit and tradition long after the reason has been forgotten. In some instances, the considerations which produced the sentiment and thus led to the establishment of a compulsory rule, though satisfactory at the time, are such as would be discarded in a more enlightened age. Knowledge

therefore must tend to produce uniformity in morals by exposing ancient errors and by opposing everything that rests on tradition alone.

Though this perfect moral code has not yet been attained, there can be no doubt but that most of the moral rules recognised by the most advanced peoples have a natural basis, and have therefore an authority independent of the individual will. We are therefore entitled to regard them as natural laws and as manifestations to us of the divine will. Morality thus obtains the sanction of religion. It is not at first distinguished from religion, but is practised simply as obedience to the apparently arbitrary commands of one who has power to enforce them and who is regarded with superstitious fear. It is afterwards regarded as compliance with an abstract and impersonal law, enforced indirectly by the government and directly by society. Reflection at length shows that it has a natural basis in the human mind and the external world; and as what is natural is now recognised as divine, the practice of morality comes to be regarded, as it was in its primitive form, as obedience to the Supreme Being. Religion thus comes to the support of virtue, and feelings of reverence and affection and fidelity reinforce the ordinary motives which lead to the practice of morality.

Moral laws are also supposed to differ from physical laws inasmuch as they imply obligation

and may be violated. The term law, when applied to the physical world, is apt to convey an erroneous impression. We have great difficulty in dissociating the term even when applied only metaphorically to material objects from the idea of command enforced by penalties. A physical law simply expresses a uniformity of relation in the same conditions, and is a fact ascertained by observation and experiment. Such a law could not be violated, for its failure in a single instance would show that we were wrong in assuming it to be a law. A moral law is equally a natural uniformity. God has given us a certain mental constitution and established a fixed relation between conduct and its consequences. In this sense a moral law cannot be violated.

It is true approximately that we cannot perform an action without incurring the natural consequences. If we escape them, it can only be through the intervention of some other natural law. The sense of obligation is based on this natural constitution of things in accordance with the natural constitution of the mind. Man is endowed with a certain liberty of action, and in the exercise of it he fulfils the law of his nature, and cannot violate any law. The consequences of certain actions operate as a restraint, but he may choose to encounter them. It is a natural law that man should have the sense of obligation, and he does not violate this natural law in disregarding it. In virtue of his constitution and situation, man has arrived at certain

rules of action ; but these are not laws in the sense in which the term is applied to natural uniformities. These rules and the sense of obligation connected with them are facts of consciousness, and are capable of violation from their very nature. A moral rule does not cease to be a rule though we fail in some instances to comply with it ; nor does it cease to have a natural basis and to express the divine will. Though moral rules are established by the mind itself and may be violated, it does not follow that they are purely optional. As they arise naturally in the human mind in contact with conditions established by God, they may be regarded as divine institutions. This, in fact, is the earliest conception of morality, and we are prone to regard moral precepts simply as the arbitrary commands of God. Morality and obedience, as we have already said, are thus identical ; and it is deemed as much our duty to obey some positive enactment of whatever nature, provided we are satisfied that it is a divine command, as the most generally recognised moral precept. According to this view, God Himself must be morally indifferent, —His will constituting moral precepts to us.

We cannot conceive God as acting except under the condition of time. We have already attempted to show that morality has a natural basis in man and in the material world. If we believe them to have been framed according to the divine pleasure, so far we hold morality to be dependent

on the will of God, which is thus represented as morally indifferent. We may either overlook this origin of the moral constitution of things and represent God as simply recognising and sanctioning moral obligation; or after it has been created according to the divine will, we may consider it as an independent existence, and on this ground attribute goodness and truth to God. There is a difficulty in recognising anything as independent of an infinite Being; but if we are to avoid representing God as morally indifferent, we must either recognise the independent existence of a moral constitution in man and the world, or admit that this constitution is determined not by the will but by the nature of God,—thus also restricting the divine will. If goodness and truth were determined by the will of God, to attribute them to Him would merely be saying that God does as He wills. Morality must therefore be regarded as something independent and also uniform, inasmuch as all natural laws are uniform, and cannot be supposed to be affected by the divine will. If we were to make the supposition that God commanded us to act contrary to a moral precept, we should regard the command as obligatory only on account of His power to enforce it. But the natural restraints of providence correspond with, and to some extent constitute, the admitted moral laws, so that if God were to exercise His power to enforce such a command as we have supposed Him to issue, the mani-

festation of this power would require to be something in addition, or rather in opposition, to nature as presently constituted. If, however, we regard all natural law as the expression of the divine will, we shall deem it a contradiction to suppose that God can by an arbitrary command express a will in direct opposition to His will as manifested in the moral laws which He has established in nature.

God is a moral governor inasmuch as He has established morality on a natural and independent basis,—nature being so constituted that personal and social well-being is uniformly consistent with the performance of duty. “An author of nature being supposed, it is not so much a deduction of reason as a matter of experience, that we are thus under His government; under His government in the same sense as we are under the government of civil magistrates. Because the annexing pleasure to some actions and pain to others, in our power to do or forbear, and giving notice of this appointment beforehand to those whom it concerns, is the proper formal notion of government.”\* We have already referred to the fact that the fundamental element in conscience is the susceptibility to pleasure and pain and the dread with which the threatened infliction of suffering is regarded. The principal restraint upon our conduct is exercised by our fellow-men. It is chiefly through the pun-

\* Butler's Analogy, Part I. chapter ii.

ishment they inflict and the disapprobation they manifest that the sense of obligation is developed within us. The religious element mingles with it from the very first; but our conception of God as a governor is based upon our conception of a human governor, or the two conceptions in the rudest condition of mankind are not yet differentiated,—the God and the ruler being the same person. There are few ideas more familiar than that of punishment. It is through punishment that obedience is secured in domestic as well as social life. We interpret phenomena in the light of our most familiar ideas. We are impatient of ignorance, and accordingly we are ever ready to establish analogies between what we know and what we cannot otherwise comprehend, and thus reduce everything to the level of our own limited experience. This hasty generalization is the source of innumerable errors, which are eradicated slowly and with difficulty by a more extended observation. We experience many evils which are not inflicted by our fellow-men, which we cannot avert or in any way control, or even foresee. Because they are evils, we assume that they are identical with punishments. As they are not inflicted by man they must be inflicted by some one else, and accordingly they are attributed to God. When some non-preventible evil happens, we conclude that God is offended with us,—that He is angry and takes this method of punishing us. The particular offence which we

regard as the cause of the divine indignation is determined by our conception of the divine character. As this conception reflects the moral condition of those who entertain it, it will vary with that condition. In primitive civilizations, the neglect of some customary tribute or the omission of some act of ceremonial worship, is deemed sufficient to excite the wrath of a god. "We find severe vengeance taken on mortals by the Homeric deities, not for pride or arrogance generally, but for some special affront to their own dignity; and particularly for any presumptuous attempt to dispute their pre-eminence." What is pleasing to an earthly despot is supposed to please a deity,—and what offends him rouses the divine vengeance and exposes the offender to some terrible calamity.

When a higher conception of God is attained, it is sin alone which incurs the divine displeasure. In all cases, the analogy of punishments inflicted by man is accepted as a satisfactory explanation of all the natural evils that flesh is heir to. Toil, famine, accident, pain, disease and death, storm; earthquake, flood and drought, proceed directly from God, and are sent for the purpose of punishing human disobedience. Snakes are regarded by Derham as "scourges upon ungrateful and sinful men." We are so accustomed to regard evil as a punishment that we hastily conclude that all evil is related to transgression. In consequence of the powerful association established between vice and



evil, it is almost impossible to sever the two conceptions even in imagination, and the most obvious considerations that tend to throw doubt on the universality of this connexion are disregarded. For example, natural evils which are beyond human control have no fixed relations to the character of those who are subjected to them, and therefore differ essentially from punishments. This difficulty is soon perceived, but never solved. We find Goethe in his sixth year puzzled by learning that in the earthquake at Lisbon, the just and the unjust were alike consigned to destruction. He satisfied himself with the consideration that "God knows very well that an immortal soul can receive no injury from a mortal accident."\* Goethe thus lighted upon a solution, advanced in ancient philosophy. This difficulty, though obvious, does not suffice to destroy the hypothesis which assumes natural calamities such as the one just mentioned to be penal. "It was easier to them to class these phenomena among other things, the cause of which was unknown to them, and thus retain their present and innate condition of ignorance, than to destroy all the fabric of their belief, and excogitate a new one."† Prepossessed by the hypothesis, we dwell upon apparent illustrations of it, and shut our eyes to all adverse facts. When some appalling natural evil falls upon a notorious offender we are furnished with an instance which accords with the hypothesis,

\* Lewes' Life of Goethe.

† Spinoza De Deo.

and which will bear it up against a host of failures. When an hypothesis is found to be defective, it is easy to invent another hypothesis to account for the failure. When the divine government does not accord with our ideal conception of what it ought to be, we assume that there is compensation provided in the future life for the apparent irregularities of the present. The sinner who attains success in this world will receive his due reward in the next; and the evils endured by the good will be compensated by a corresponding felicity. If this explanation is not satisfactory, it may suffice to say that the ways of providence are mysterious; it is easier to believe in mystery than to suspect the correctness of our theory.

Punishment implies the power of avoiding the offence for which it is inflicted. It is a new motive brought to bear on the will; and would be unjustifiable if the offence were not committed by the party punished, or even if it had no effect in deterring from crime. We know that there are certain evils which are the natural results of immoral conduct, and which may be avoided by adhering to duty. Such evils resemble punishments, inasmuch as they act upon our susceptibilities and thus restrain our conduct. There are other evils however which are incident to a condition of progress, which the individual in the circumstances in which he is placed is wholly unable to prevent, but which may ultimately be extirpated or at least re-

duced to a minimum. There are other evils still which cannot be proved to have any relation to moral offences, and which seem to be utterly beyond all human control. It is impossible to fix the exact boundary which separates preventible from non-preventible evils. The savage suffers famine from drought and attributes it to the Great Spirit. His priest is a rain-maker. He does not know how to irrigate his fields with water stored when it is plentiful, or if he is taught he deems it presumptuous. He has no means of taking advantage of the surplus which may exist at no great distance from the place where he lives. By the progress of knowledge and by a better organization of society, mankind have been enabled to free themselves from many evils which were formerly regarded as the dispensation of Heaven. We know that an evil is preventible only after we have discovered the means of preventing it. Whatever may ultimately be found to be the extent of non-preventible evil, we know practically that there are many evils borne which are at present beyond the control of the sufferer. In the natural course of things, we find children suffering in consequence of the misconduct of their parents. They inherit weak and imperfect constitutions, or they are reared in circumstances unfavourable to the development of their moral and intellectual faculties, and may thus be exposed throughout life to evils entailed

upon them before they were capable of distinguishing between right and wrong.

Again, we are liable to accidents which we cannot altogether prevent. There can be no doubt that the great proportion of the accidents which happen are due to preventible causes, and may be traced to the non-observance of known conditions of safety. Even when, by the employment of the necessary precautions, danger is reduced to the smallest limit, there is still, in general, a residuum left which it is impossible to annihilate. Such accidents cannot be regarded as the punishment of moral offences to which they have no invariable relations. The eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell were not sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem. In certain cases, it may even appear as if the good had been selected to suffer by accident while the wicked escaped or were rewarded.

A great number of the evils which mankind suffer in the course of nature, or which they inflict on each other, may be ascribed to ignorance apart from morality. Certain conditions are essential to individual and social well-being, and we cannot fulfil these conditions until we know them. This knowledge, not being possessed intuitively, must be acquired, and in the mean time we are exposed to the evils which knowledge would enable us to avoid. The acquisition of knowledge is

necessarily slow and laborious, and even when attained by a few, it is long before it is generally diffused. The eager desire to obtain an explanation of the phenomena which first impress the mind is for a time satisfied by the ready devices of the imagination, and it is long before the reason calmly surveying the face of nature is enabled to throw off the yoke of the imagination, and lay the foundations of a positive science. Man has thus to contend against error as well as ignorance in the struggle after truth.

We also endure many evils which are due to our social condition rather than our own conduct, and from which good conduct would not exempt us. Poverty may in general be traced to the defective moral character of the sufferer, but in some cases it is due to the conduct of others, and to commercial depression, caused by ignorance or neglect of the principles of political economy. The world has suffered much from religious bigotry and persecution, and those who suffer may be the best and most tolerant of men. The same may be said of political oppression. War extends its ravages beyond the combatants, and brings the direst evils upon the districts through which the devastating armies pass, and upon the innocent inhabitants of beleaguered towns. The expense incurred in its prosecution is left as a burden to gall the shoulders of unnumbered generations.

How many of our fellow-men, urged by the

stern necessity of providing the necessaries of life for themselves and their families, are borne down with excessive toil, their bodily frames wasted and their mental powers undeveloped. Labour is a natural institution, and gives scope for the exercise of our pent-up energies. When excessive, it is an evil, and a warning to us that there is something defective in our social organization; but how many are there that will innocently suffer before this defect is discovered and remedied!

There are other evils to which mankind are sometimes exposed, such as storms and earthquakes, which are not connected in any degree with human conduct. Such evils are clearly distinguishable from those which are wholly or partially preventible. They have however generally been classed with these others, and regarded as special judgments of Heaven. Such an explanation, though satisfactory to the great bulk of mankind, who adopt it without any inquiry, will be seen to be insufficient on mature consideration. We can discover no relation between human conduct and geological and meteorological causes, which have been operating for an indefinite period in the past, and which are apparently not confined to our globe; nor is there the slightest probability in favour of such a connexion. Such evils, having no relation to conduct, could only be known to be penalties by special revelation. No reliable evidence has ever been adduced to prove that they may be averted

by reformation. Some countries for example are liable to storms or earthquakes, owing, we have every reason to believe, to certain physical conditions beyond human control. These phenomena, in all probability, prevailed before those regions were inhabited, and have never been observed to vary in correspondence with changes in the moral condition or conduct of the people who occupy them. Venomous reptiles do not disappear at the bidding of a saint.

How, it will be asked, are we to reconcile the existence of such evils with the infinite wisdom and goodness of God? This difficulty we are assured can only be met by regarding them as punishments. No man suffers more than he deserves, or can accuse God of injustice, whether his suffering proceed directly from his own conduct or from causes over which he has no control. God would not create a world in which the perfectly pure and holy would be exposed to evil; and we must therefore regard non-preventible evils as penalties in order to overcome a difficulty which is in truth one of our own creation. We have said that there are some evils which are non-preventible at present, but which through the progress of knowledge may in time come to be regarded as preventible; while there are other evils which are wholly beyond human control. With regard to the first class it may be shown that they are incident to a state of progress, and that, other things

remaining the same, it is better that they should be incurred than that the conditions on which they depend should be changed. They may be viewed as the sacrifices that must be made in order to secure certain great advantages. As the world is constituted, the latter cannot be had without the former, but are cheaply purchased at them. Take for example the evils incident to the condition of progress in knowledge. Man is born simply with the capacity of acquiring knowledge, and in the mean time suffers much from ignorance. He has many falls before he learns to walk. As we have already said, many difficulties are encountered in the acquisition of knowledge, but by meeting and overcoming them our intellect is strengthened and developed. The power to avert evils which knowledge gives us is itself a powerful stimulus to intellectual effort. Were man endowed with intuitive knowledge sufficient to guide him through life, he would thereby lose many sources of pleasure of the highest kind. He would be exposed to fewer evils, but he would have fewer enjoyments. The lower animals are unerringly guided by instincts, but their sphere of action is very limited. Man may suffer more than they do on account of his ignorance, but he possesses an infinitely wider range of action and enjoyment. Had we been created not merely with the capacity of acquiring knowledge but with knowledge itself, we should have been deprived of that exquisite pleasure



which its acquisition affords. The pleasure of pursuit greatly exceeds that of possession, even when the possession is due to our own exertions. Did we possess all knowledge intuitively, there would be no field for the exercise of our faculties. Besides, the effort necessary to acquire knowledge so strengthens the faculties as to open up to us the prospect of its indefinite extension. Were a certain amount of knowledge possessed without effort, our minds would not be disciplined and invigorated by exercise, and would be unable to overcome the difficulties attending its further extension. We should also be deprived of the stimulus afforded by the desire to be relieved of the evils which ignorance entails. We should lose both the power and the inducement to make progress.

The evils we temporarily endure in consequence of being created simply with the capacity of acquiring knowledge are not so great as might at first be supposed, in consequence of certain compensatory arrangements. The desire of knowledge is very strong in infancy, and the experience of parents and others is a fund on which the child may draw not merely for information alone, but also for aid in acquiring it for himself. As the child receives the benefit of the knowledge acquired by his parents, so one generation inherits the knowledge of the preceding generation; and not only so, but the accumulated fund which has been formed by the transmitted knowledge of all the

previous ages becomes available to it. At times men make their appearance in the world possessed of pre-eminent abilities for investigating truth. The results of their labours are transmitted; their successors are enabled to devote their energies to their extension; and thus from age to age the stock of knowledge is increased, and new paths of inquiry are opened up. By the invention of printing, this knowledge is with great facility recorded, transmitted, and diffused. In the ready access to this ever-growing fund lie our best hopes of the progress of the race; and by means of this compensation of providence, the evils mankind have so long suffered from ignorance and error will ultimately be in a great measure averted.

Certain evils are incident to a condition of progress, and in the existing constitution of things we cannot conceive them to be removed and the condition of progress at the same time maintained. If we are asked why the constitution of the world is such as we find it, why we might not have the advantages of progress without the attendant evils, we answer that such questions are absurd. We can neither say that this is the best of possible worlds, or that it might have been different from what it is. We know nothing about the possibilities of world-making. Any reason we could give must be founded on the existing condition of things, and might be no reason at all were this condition changed. How then are we to reconcile such

evils and those arising from physical conditions beyond our control with the infinite goodness of God? The difficulty, we have said, is of our own making. We assume that the representation of God as possessed of infinite wisdom and goodness is an adequate representation of the divine nature, and then we make a vain attempt to reconcile the existence of non-preventible evils with these perfections. The difficulty arises from this assumption. It cannot be solved, but it need not exist. We attribute to God the highest form of morality we can conceive, but we do not even then obtain an adequate representation of His nature. We can form no conception of God as He is, but only as He can be presented to a finite mind. As our conception is necessarily imperfect we need feel no surprise when we meet with phenomena we cannot reconcile with that finite representation. Could we know God as He is, all difficulties would no doubt disappear; but before we could do so, we should require to become infinite ourselves. There is nothing gained therefore by calling non-preventible evils penalties despite their essential difference, for the difficulty we thus attempt to surmount lies deeper than we suppose, and belongs essentially to our inadequate conception of the divine nature. It is better to confess our ignorance than to adhere to an erroneous theory.

We have seen that all evils are assumed to be punishments, and to be explicable on this supposition

alone; but they are likewise held to be analogous in every respect to punishments inflicted by man. In the case of human punishments, the time of their infliction, their nature, and degree of severity, are determined somewhat arbitrarily. The punishment may follow the commission of the offence immediately, or it may be delayed for a longer or shorter time according to the pleasure of the authority that inflicts it. There is no necessary connexion between the offence and the nature or severity of the punishment. At one time, or in one country, an offence may be punished by imprisonment, at another time, or in another country, by banishment or death.

The natural evils we endure, and which are regarded as divine punishments, are also believed to be direct and arbitrary inflictions. God interposes to send the pestilence and the storm, which are assumed to be direct and immediate acts having reference to man's sin alone, and having no necessary connexion with natural antecedents and consequents. The punishment may thus be inflicted as soon as the offence is committed, or the divine vengeance may slumber and break out after it is forgotten, or God may seem to disregard it altogether. The wicked may even enjoy prosperity in this life, while the good are surrounded with troubles. The nature and extent of the infliction as well as the time are supposed to depend entirely upon the will of God, and to have no necessary relation to the natural course of events. God visits the same offence at one time with disease, at another with adversity.

Such views of the divine government were evidently suggested by the analogy of human government before there was any conception of the universality of natural laws, and when the gods were supposed to rule by arbitrary unconnected acts. Science tends to correct these views by showing that no event is arbitrary or unrelated. The evils we suffer are no exceptions. Many of them are observed to be related to the moral character of our actions. An immoral action brings evil in its train as certainly as cause produces effect. So varied and complicated are the circumstances with which we are surrounded, that it is impossible to predict the precise consequences of any given act. As in all cases in which numerous and varying causes are at work, the phenomena assume an arbitrary character, and seem exempt from the operation of fixed laws; and this circumstance accounts for the fact that the invariable connexion between the evils we endure and the immoral conduct which leads to them is so seldom recognised. The same evil will be found to follow the same moral offence when the conditions are the same. Could we unravel the intricate web of human life, we should doubtless detect evils which are sometimes entirely concealed from us or seem to be altogether deferred. The rules of induction are as applicable here as in other departments of science, and it is only when these rules are successfully applied that we are justified in connecting a particular evil with a particular offence.

There are other evils which are wholly beyond human control, and which can in no degree be determined by human conduct. No uniform relations can be traced between such events and human offences; but these evils, as well as those dependent upon conduct, are subject to law, though they appear arbitrary to us from our ignorance of their causes.

It is maintained by some that suffering is sent as a punishment for sin in general, or for some particular sin, without having any natural relation to it. Were we able to trace every instance of suffering to some offence, we should have no difficulty in dealing with this opinion. We know assuredly that some offences tend to evil by uniform sequence. Certain evils may be connected with moral conduct or may be removable by more intelligent action, and we may be unable from ignorance to perceive their dependence on causes susceptible of control. In such cases we are apt to regard the evil as a punishment for sin in general, or some sin which we consider peculiarly aggravated, and which we expect to be punished in a visible manner. Ague prevailed at one time in a certain district, and was looked upon as a punishment for sin in general. When the marshes were drained and the fields better cultivated, the ague disappeared, and its true cause was made apparent. More extended knowledge would enable us to trace the causes which produce evil and to ascertain how far they can be controlled, and we should in all

probability find that many of the evils we are so apt to regard as arbitrary inflictions sent by God on account of sin in general, are distinctly traceable to our ignorance or neglect of those natural conditions which are essential to our physical, moral, and intellectual well-being. There would still, it is true, be a residuum of non-preventible evils, which might be assumed to be punishments for sin in general. Dr M'Cosh tells us that when an individual "is known on independent evidence to have sinned, we are warranted, whether the sin be physically connected with the suffering or no, in tracing a connexion appointed by God himself."\* On what ground are we to regard it as a penalty? Are we to do so simply because it follows an offence or because it co-exists with a sinful nature? But prosperity sometimes attends the sinner, and we are equally entitled to say that God sometimes rewards an offence as that he sometimes punishes it. Besides, two things may co-exist, but we have no right to assume that they are connected unless we can prove it. We have already disposed of the argument that it is necessary to assume that all evils are punitive in order to "justify to our moral nature the dealings of God in inflicting such wide-spread misery upon mankind." Evils cannot be regarded as punishments unless they are found by experience to fulfil the conditions which the term implies.

\* The Method of Divine Government, p. 206.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PRESENT STATE OF OPINION REGARDING DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

As the structure of the full-grown animal cannot be fully explained until its development has been traced, so the state of opinion at the present day on any subject of general interest cannot be understood without taking into account the influence of the past. Opinions are not adopted or discarded at random, but are related to the circumstances in which men are placed, and the extent of knowledge which they have inherited. Progress is made by adding to, modifying, and correcting or superseding, previous generalizations. We shall be more strongly convinced of the necessity of taking into consideration the history of opinion in our attempts to account for existing opinions, when we consider the strong tendency which those that were formed in the infancy of the race have to take possession of the mind, and to become consolidated into beliefs.

There are many causes which tend to give



permanency to early speculations. There is the influence of authority, which is greater in the early ages than in later and more civilized times. There is also the influence of habit, causing what was at first mere speculation to be at length accepted as established fact, or even intuitive belief. Opinions cannot be regarded as wholly isolated. Our opinions on one subject may indicate our habitual mode of thinking on all subjects, or they may directly influence our views on other subjects. They do not therefore stand or fall by themselves, and this fact gives them a certain persistence which they would not otherwise have. They cannot be altered or abandoned without effecting a change greater or less upon all those views which take a colouring from them, and in some cases a complete revolution in the accustomed mode of thinking on all subjects. The opinions of primitive times also leave their impress upon language then in the course of formation,—the words composing it retaining somewhat of their original signification. They are also embodied in the earliest literature, and derive a certain amount of permanency from the estimation in which that literature is held. Not only have early opinions the advantage arising from priority, but also from the greater tenacity with which they are held. When there is great energy of will and but little accumulated knowledge, the mind accepts with the utmost confidence its first impressions, and generalizes them before

waiting to see whether they will be confirmed by subsequent experience. New opinions which contradict those first entertained have therefore strong opposing influences to contend with before they can take possession of the mind. Sometimes the contradiction is not at first obvious, or can be seen only when the mind calmly and philosophically compares the opposing views, and thus the hereditary opinions, being entwined with our mode of reasoning on all other subjects, retain their influence long after we have perceived their inconsistency with what we know to be demonstrated truth. This persistence of early beliefs tends to bias the mind against new opinions, and incapacitates it for perceiving the evidence by which they are supported. So strong is the tendency to adhere to them that they may be retained even when their inconsistency with demonstrated truth is clearly appreciated. They are, as it were, so much a part of ourselves as to appear intuitive; the contradiction is not always present to the mind, and when perceived is apt to be regarded as apparent only. An orthodox form of belief may remain long after it has been thoroughly undermined, and may present externally every appearance of stability. Even after it has lost all vitality, it requires some rude shock to bring it down.

The first opinions are the most likely to be erroneous, or defective, especially if the pheno-

mena they are meant to explain are at all complicated. More extended experience may confirm, but is far more likely to contradict the first hasty generalizations. Truth when ascertained does not take quiet possession of the mind, but has first to expel the errors which have obtained a previous lodgment. "The original dowry of universal man is inadvertency and error. This assumption is the ground and only justification of the existence of philosophy."\*

The foregoing observations appear to throw considerable light on the present state of opinion on the providential government of God. There is a presumption that the views first entertained on this subject will be found to be imperfect if not erroneous, for they were formed when knowledge was both limited in range and indefinite in quality, and when a strong tendency existed to assimilate, without much consideration, the remote and obscure to the near and familiar. These early beliefs have descended to our own times, deriving this permanency from the causes to which we have just referred. They have been so long entertained as to be generally accepted as intuitive, and the prevailing mode of thought on kindred subjects has been greatly influenced by them. Our religious feelings have been so entwined with them as to be almost identified with them, and to relinquish them seems to most people equivalent to

\* Ferrier's *Institutes of Metaphysic*, p. 30.

parting with religion itself. Those who dispute them are branded as infidels, though the views which they desire to substitute for them may in the course of time be regarded as consistent with religion, and may be as closely identified with it as the former views were believed to be.

Many of the hasty generalizations formed in the infancy of the race would soon be found to be opposed to a more enlarged experience, and would thus be prevented from taking a strong hold of the mind. There are some however which influence our mode of observation itself, and which thus prevent the mind from perceiving the facts with which they are inconsistent. Of this character are the primitive views of providence. The discovery of uniform relations is seen to be inconsistent with the representation of phenomena as isolated, but the uniform relations first ascertained are few, and there is as yet no reason for believing that all phenomena are uniformly related. We do not form our views of providence from scientific observation, but we accommodate our observation to the views with which we are prepossessed. The inconsistency between the scientific and the supernatural view is felt (if felt at all) only in a few cases, and there is a wide field left in which the ancient belief may be indulged without any fear of contradiction. Even the few who attain a firm and clear conviction of the universality of natural law, are in general so much under the influence of

early training, and of sympathy with the popular belief, that they adhere to the primitive method of representing the divine agency, despite its inconsistency with the inductive philosophy, and labour to prove that this inconsistency is only apparent. Others admit the inconsistency, but regard both views as inadequate.

The present age is remarkable for this conflict between primitive beliefs and scientific inductions. We are in a transitional, and consequently unsettled state, the primitive beliefs exercising great influence, often unconsciously, on our speculations, and still more on our practical views of life, and contending against the claims of science to exclude or at least essentially to modify them. It is not difficult to foresee that a great change—let us call it a second reformation—is approaching. Many are preparing to throw off the bondage of authoritative dogmas as our ancestors did that of an authoritative Church. Some have already done so, though they do not obtrude their scepticism and court the modern equivalent for martyrdom. Many who have not gone this length yet feel keenly the inconsistency of their theological beliefs with their scientific knowledge and mode of thinking, bear with impatience these diverse tendencies, and would gladly be relieved. As the scientific mode of thought is the active and growing element, this uneasiness so generally felt tends to depreciation of dogmas and loosening of

faith in them. The influence of the scientific mode of thinking has not been confined to those who have most successfully prosecuted it, but has been widely diffused amongst those who can appreciate the results of science without being able to follow its processes.

The influence of the early mode of representing the divine agency is to be observed in the popular arguments for the existence of God. "The most exact and recondite adaptation of means to accomplish an obvious end is *no more peculiarly* an evidence of design, than the universal arrangement according to determinate laws which pervades the depths of cosmical space,—where we are least able to trace any end."\* The argument derived from final causes is, notwithstanding, the only argument for the existence of the Deity which is generally understood and accepted, though the argument founded on systematic arrangement is slowly gaining ground as the universality of law is more clearly perceived. The demonstration of symmetry in nature is still regarded with dislike by many, being supposed to destroy the proof arising from the consideration of special adaptations. The doctrine of unity of organization in plants and animals met with strenuous opposition at first on this account, and is still regarded by many with some degree of suspicion. The primitive view of providence was characterized by the

\* Powell's *Unity of Worlds*, p. 135.

reference of every event to a divine agent without any consideration of relation to antecedents or consequents. The argument from special adaptations commends itself to those who are still under the influence of this early mode of thinking, because it directs attention to certain obvious relations and isolates them from all others. It represents each adjustment as a separate contrivance, and not as part of a system in which everything is what it is in consequence of its relation to everything else. The means adopted to produce a certain end are supposed to, be designed for that end alone, and to be selected simply because they are capable of producing it without any consideration of their relations to the rest of nature. An example of design is just a particular instance of the universal harmony and adaptation of parts in nature, the means being regarded as subordinate to the end, as the more special in nature may be regarded, from a human point of view, as adapted to the more general. Any part of nature whatever may be looked on as means to an end, as each part is necessary to the remainder, nature being a system of mutual relations. No part can be removed without causing *some* change in what remains, and therefore it is the means to some extent at least of making the rest what it is. The principle of unity of organization is not an essentially different principle from that of special adaptation, though it may be convenient to consider them apart. The former

prevails so long as the conditions on which it depends exist. Slight variations in these conditions modify the type, a complete change produces an alteration of the type. The type is in relation to its conditions just as the modification of the type is in relation to its conditions; the only difference consists in this, that the conditions of the former are more constant and more extensive than those of the latter.

The speciality of the principle of adaptation is founded on the possibility of viewing certain adjusted relations apart from general relations, and is more striking when they appear to us to be opposed to the general order of things. Anomalies therefore are supposed to be peculiarly providential, and are the favourite topics of writers on natural theology. The anomaly that water expands instead of contracting on the removal of heat when it reaches a certain temperature is mentioned in two of the Bridgewater Treatises, in one of which it is stated to present "the most remarkable instance of design in the whole order of nature—an instance of something done expressly and almost (could we indeed conceive such a thing of the Deity) at second thought, to accomplish a particular object."\* The fact that the atmosphere is a mixture and not a chemical combination is another instance in point. Prout tells us that "the maker of water and of air has designedly created these

\* Prout, Bohn's Ed., p. 182.



anomalies *to obviate difficulties* which would have rendered organic existence a physical impossibility."\* Here the Deity is supposed to encounter difficulties! That such anomalies (which science may very soon explain by the discovery of some general law) should be thought by scientific writers to be peculiarly providential can only be attributed to the difficulty we all experience in resisting the influence of established modes of thought.

Connected with the foregoing peculiarity of the early conception of providence was the disposition to attribute certain events to direct divine interposition. The existence of God did not then reveal itself to mankind in the order and harmony of nature, but was supposed to be proved by certain conceptions which they entertained regarding its production, and the interferences by which the natural course of things was altered. Divine action was conceived to be of the same nature as human action, only more powerful, and somewhat mysterious. As human action is manifested in interference with the sequence of events, they were induced to look for proof of divine action only in what appeared to them to be interpositions of providence. Hence they were disposed to regard wonderful and anomalous events as the special operation of Deity, and were satisfied that miracles attested His presence. Had mankind at the first attained the conception that the agency of God was manifested

\* Prout, Bohn's Ed., p. 182.

through natural laws, they would never have sought for evidence of His working in apparent interferences with it. When these interferences are explained by law, we are apt to suppose that God is being superseded. The influence of this view is extensively felt at the present day. The argument from design is sometimes stated as implying priority of existence in the more general elements and agents of nature, and subsequent creation and adaptation of those of a subordinate character. Prout, in his *Bridgewater Treatise*, represents matter as first created, then light and the other so-called imponderable forms of matter. Matter is then supposed to be endowed with certain qualities, "with the most exact regard to the influence of those prior agencies;" and these qualities are such and so distributed as to exhibit "ulterior views with respect to the destination of our globe." Lastly plants and animals were created. The adaptation of the subordinate to the more general natural agencies is held to imply that the former were created subsequently to the latter. The properties of water, being adapted to the temperature of the earth, were given to it after heat had been created and had become distributed according to the laws which determine its diffusion. The prior creation could not of itself produce the subsequent, and hence the latter must have been effected by an external and superior agent. The argument is made to rest not so much

on the fact of the adaptation of one part of nature to another as on the mode of production of the subordinate agents. God is represented as interposing, not certainly to alter, but to add to an existing order of things; and such interpositions are thought to be more providential than the uniform course of nature. Hence all apparently abrupt changes, or apparent first manifestations of higher agencies which are not explained by the more general laws, are sought for with avidity, and appealed to as significant proofs of the divine operation.

The aim of science is directly opposed to this. Its endeavour is to show that there is no discontinuity in phenomena, and that the existing disposition of things is the natural result of a prior disposition. Natural theologians delight to believe that an omnipotent arm was required to give the planets the position and motions in space which we now behold; and oppose with vehemence such views as the nebular hypothesis of Laplace, which Sir D. Brewster has the weakness and temerity to call "the dull and dangerous heresy of the age." In geology, they are the warm advocates of the doctrine of catastrophes and abrupt transitions as opposed to that of uniformity; they believe in the creation and immutability of species, and think it something very much akin to profanity to attribute their origin to natural law. They look with positive aversion on all speculations which

attempt to prove that language and civilization are natural growths, and dispense with all discussion about their origin by believing them to be supernatural creations. The ancient beliefs so influence the popular natural theology on these and similar subjects, as to place it in direct antagonism to science; but it is not difficult to predict which must give way.

It is a favourite opinion of some natural theologians, that the evidence for the existence of God is to be found not so much in the existence of matter, or even its laws, as in its dispositions. We are told "that with laws and without collocations or dispositions, we should still have but a heaving, turbid, disorderly chaos; whereas it is by the collocations as adapted to the laws that the only decisive indications of counsel or contrivance are given."\*

Even were this representation correct, it is difficult to see wherein its superiority as evidence for the existence of God lies. The mutual relation of parts manifests intelligence; and the more we can trace order and system in the universe, the more clearly do we perceive it to be the work of a divine mind. No law can be traced in collocations that are apparently arbitrary; and thus they fail to yield the evidence we are in search of. The most satisfactory evidence is to be found in existing law

\* Natural Theology, by Thos. Chalmers, D.D., p. 111. Select Works.

and symmetry, and not in the necessary supposition that some one must exist to bring order out of confusion, as we have no assurance that there ever was confusion, or that there would have been confusion had there been no interference.

Some beneficial arrangement is found to depend upon a certain number of co-existing circumstances. Let us suppose that these circumstances are not known to be mutually dependent, or to be the result of some common cause, and that we may conceive one or other of them to be different while the others remain unchanged. The concurrence of these independent circumstances, it is said, must be the result of design. Were they few in number it might be supposed that their combination was fortuitous; but when numerous such a supposition is excluded. Let us suppose now that the circumstances producing the beneficial arrangement are discovered to be the result of a common cause, and that their combination is thus accounted for. It is obvious that the argument founded on the independent nature of the circumstances falls to the ground. What is the value of an argument which must retreat as science advances? It may never be driven into a corner, as the region of the unexplained is boundless, but its safety lies in retreat. This necessity is admitted by natural theologians themselves. Dr Chalmers writes—"Could all the beauties and benefits of the astronomical system be referred to the single

law of gravitation, it would greatly reduce the strength of the argument for a designing cause ;” \* and in another place speaks of Laplace robbing us of the argument for a God that may be founded on the contingency of the law of gravitation. †

The error arises from confounding the evidence of human contrivance with that of divine workmanship. We find matter possessed of certain properties, and we arrange it in such a manner as will effect the object we have in view. We do not give matter its properties, and the proof of human interference is to be found only in the dispositions we give to its parts. As regards nature, we cannot say that God, like man, finds matter possessed of certain properties, and that He merely disposes its parts to effect certain useful purposes. We are told that “ laws of themselves would announce nought whatever of the hand or mind of an artificer.” But God is not an artificer, and the evidence which would satisfactorily establish the fact of human contrivance is not applicable to the work of God. In nature we cannot distinguish between law and collocation, and say that law is one thing and collocation something totally different. Collocation is frequently, probably always, determined by law ; and if laws, according to Dr Chalmers, afford no evidence of the Deity, what evidence is left ?

We cannot conceive matter existing apart from

\* Natural Theology, pp. 119, 127. † Ib.

the laws of matter, nor can we conceive laws apart from their adjustments. Matter is what we find it because it is part of the whole; and if it did not belong to a certain whole, it would not be what it is. The laws of matter are such as we find them because the conditions of their operation are such as exist; and if we suppose the conditions altered, we must suppose the laws to be different. No force has an independent existence and immutable laws, whatever other forces may co-exist with it. Collocation is not something which can be completely dissociated from property or law. The properties of a chemical substance may be altered by a change in the collocation of its atoms. We may, in imagination, fix upon certain portions of nature and suppose them to be differently arranged without any violent change in their laws or properties, but we can have very little idea of all that must be implied in a new disposition of things.

We are told by Dr. Chalmers that the laws of matter merely uphold its movements, but do not account for the arrangement of its parts. "The dispositions of matter in the planetary system were fixed at the original setting up of the machine. The laws of matter were ordained for the working of the machine." \* The present condition of things however is not permanent, and could not have been the original condition. Nature does not resemble a machine with a uniform action, and requiring

\* Natural Theology, p. 119.

a uniform force to keep it in motion. The world now is very different from what it was many million years ago, but its present condition is the necessary result of its past condition through the operation of uniform laws. Successive phenomena are related, as well as co-existing phenomena; and we cannot understand nature as a system or *cosmos* without taking into consideration both succession and co-existence. Progress is perfectly compatible with the universal prevalence of law in time and space. We are apt to confound constancy of law with uniformity of result. When there is the appearance of permanence in nature, we hastily conclude that there is no change; and when results are pre-eminently variable, we suppose there is no law. If the present collocation of things were destroyed, existing laws might not restore them; but they would certainly do so if the present condition of things were made to resemble in every particular some past condition.

It may be admitted that the present is developed out of the past by uniform law; but then we shall be reminded that the existing collocation of causes is determined by a prior collocation which remains to be accounted for. When we search the past for an explanation of the present we find facts as well as laws, combinations of causes as well as laws of causation. However far back we go, some collocation must have existed, and this primitive collocation of independent causes, we are told, must



have been produced by design. Now science, from its very nature, can tell us nothing about the creation of things. It shows how one condition was produced out of a pre-existing condition according to uniform laws; but however far back it takes us, we never come to a condition of things before which there was nothing. It explains the past by existing laws, but it can tell us nothing of what happened before these laws existed.

But though science does not conduct us to an origin in time, it leads to the discovery of unity of principle. It is true that all phenomena have not been traced to one common cause, but a great many, once believed to be independent, have. All natural phenomena may be traced to certain causes, which Mr Mill calls permanent causes or original natural agents. Beyond these we cannot at present go. "We can give no account of the origin of the permanent Causes themselves. Why these particular natural agents existed originally and no others, or why they are commingled in such and such proportions, and distributed in such and such a manner throughout space, is a question we cannot answer. More than this: we can discover nothing regular in the distribution itself; we can reduce it to no uniformity, to no law."\* It does not follow that no law exists binding these permanent causes together, because we have failed to detect it. They appear to us to

\* Mill's *Logic*, vol. i., p. 378.

be casual concurrences, but this may be due to our ignorance. All analogy is opposed to the supposition that they are merely casual. Phenomena apparently as independent have been traced to a common cause, or have been shown to be subject to the same laws. Nature is a system of mutually related parts, and not of independent elements casually combined. Certain uniformities of co-existence are observed, some of which only are known to depend on causation, and the laws by which they are expressed must therefore be regarded as empirical. They have however been found permanent within the limits of observation. Laws of succession do not differ in this respect from laws of co-existence. They are more or less general, and are also found to be permanent. Though some of them appear to be ultimate laws of nature, we have no assurance that they really are so. Their permanence is no more absolute than that of some laws of co-existence. The highest laws of causation may, for aught we know, be derivative and therefore empirical. Their permanence may not be due to their essence, but to the constancy of the unknown conditions on which they depend.

We may refer, in further evidence of the transitional state of opinion at the present day on the subject of providence, to the view held by some philosophical theologians that it is manifested not in law, but in the fortuitous events which abound in the world. They distinguish between events

which occur in an orderly manner, which may be expressed by general laws, and which may be predicted; and those events which, in consequence of the great number and variable action of the natural agents which produce them, cannot be expressed by any general law, but are of an individual character and cannot be foreseen. It is the latter class alone that are regarded as providential. The prevalence of accident is "the grand means which the Governor of the world employs for the accomplishment of His specific purposes, and by which His providence is rendered a particular providence, reaching to the most minute incidents and embracing all events and every event. It is the especial instrument employed by him to keep man dependent, and make him feel his dependence."\* So says Dr M'Cosh, and quotes as follows from Isaac Taylor. "But there is a higher government of men, as moral and religious beings, which is carried on chiefly by means of the fortuities of life. Those unforeseen accidents which so often control the lot of man, constitute a superstratum in the system of human affairs, wherein peculiarly the divine providence holds empire for the accomplishment of its special purposes. It is from this hidden and inexhaustible mine of chances, as we must call them, that the Governor of the world draws, with unfathomable skill, the materials of His dispensations towards each individual of mankind."

\* Method of the Divine Government, p. 164.

Such writers admit the universality of the law of causation. Fortuitous events, they tell us, do not happen without a cause; could we trace their antecedents, we should find no violation of natural law. God does not require to suspend natural laws to accomplish special ends; He may effect what He pleases by the disposition of natural agents, operating according to fixed laws. But the disposition of natural agents at any given time depends upon their preceding disposition and is determined by it. Interference with the arrangement of causes would be quite as miraculous as interference with the laws of causation. If we represent God's providence as consisting in fortuitous events alone, and if He brings about such events by so disposing natural agents as to cause them to concur, or to oppose one another, we must assume that He interferes with the natural disposition of things in order to produce such a disposition as will effect His purpose. But the disposition of things could not be interfered with, without the interruption of laws of causation; for otherwise we must hold that it is not determined by the preceding disposition. Such a representation of providence is as really supernatural as that in which law is believed to be openly interrupted or violated, and is amenable to the objections we have already advanced against supernaturalism generally. This difficulty is got over by saying that it is not neces-

sary to suppose that the disposition or adjustment is made at some moment immediately antecedent to the providential event. It is assumed that natural causes were so adjusted at the creation as to produce, to the end of time and without the necessity of further interference, such fortuitous events as were designed by providence, and that too at the very moment they were required. The opinion that providence is manifested in fortuitous events when thus presented is identified with the opinion already discussed that the divine operation is proved not by law but by collocations. In the one case collocation or adjustment is considered with reference to the proof of the existence of God ; in the other with reference to his continued operation. The belief that God's providence is manifested in the disposal of natural agencies leads naturally to the argument for His existence founded on the original adjustment of these agencies. The divine intelligence is sought for, not in the order of nature as intelligible to our reason, but in some supposed mode of production of that order. This production has generally been regarded as a continuous act taking place as occasion demanded. It is now represented to have been one original act in which all future contingencies were provided for. It represents the problem of creation to have been—given a certain number of general laws, to produce a desired series of events by

their primitive disposition, so that there shall be no necessity for subsequent interference with their uniform operation.

There is a strong tendency to regard the disposition of things as merely casual. Dr M'Cosh tells us that the word chance may be used in two different senses, in one of which only it is significant of our ignorance. There are certain results which necessarily follow from their antecedents, but which are fortuitous in consequence of our ignorance of their causes or the conditions in which they operate. We cannot predict them, and we "can see no reason why they should not have been otherwise." But "things may be said to be casually related to each other when the relation between them is not that of cause and effect, nor designed by the person producing them."\* "In respect of casual connexion, chance has and can have no place; it is absolutely excluded. But in respect of other connexions of co-existence or succession, of number and property, there is room for chance, and, as opposed to chance, of designed coincidences and correspondences, and a co-operation of associated means for the production of a given end."† Phenomena are not produced by chance, but they may be conjoined by chance. In the one case the fortuity is apparent only, and is due to our ignorance; in the other case, real; and it is argued that the presence of accident in nature does not

\* M'Cosh, *Typical Forms*, p. 42.

† *Ib.*, p. 44.

prove that the world is not the product of design, as it is not necessary to assume that *all* relations must be designed.

In opposition to these views, we hold that the concurrences referred to are casual for the same reason that certain occurrences are casual, and that in both cases alike fortuity is relative to the limits of our knowledge. Two events, let us suppose, concur, and we can assign no reason for their concurrence. Had the one been the cause of the other, we should have had no difficulty in connecting them. We shall suppose that this is not the case, and that we cannot say that they are the co-existing effects of the same cause, nor even of different causes uniformly found combined. We cannot, in short, trace any immediate causal relation between them by which we can explain their concurrence, but this does not entitle us to affirm that it is purely accidental. We may not be able to go back to some particular point in the past, and find there some circumstance from which the concurrence can be deduced. The lines of causation which meet in the concurrence when traced back are found to diverge into a net-work in which we very soon lose ourselves. But though we give up the investigation in despair, we never doubt that the concurrence has been the result of *some* preceding disposition of things, which, had it been different, would possibly have affected the event. The time at which an event shall happen de-

pend upon laws of causation as much as the fact of its happening at all, and could we know the causes and conditions which result in the concurrence of two or more events, and were we able to make the necessary calculations, it would then be possible to foretell the conjunction. The fortuitous character of the concurrence is due to our ignorance alone.

There is some difficulty in dealing with particular instances in which we can trace no immediate causal connexions. The antecedents as we trace them back get so involved as to defy all attempts to unravel them, and are so limited in extent or intensity that they are almost immediately lost amidst the infinity of nature. It is therefore utterly hopeless to connect such concurrences with preceding dispositions. The difficulty disappears when we look at nature in the aggregate. All phenomena may be traced, as we have already said, to certain primeval causes. "The whole of the phenomena of nature were therefore the necessary, or in other words, the unconditional, consequences of some former collocation of the Permanent Causes. The state of the whole universe at any instant, we believe to be the consequence of its state at the previous instant; insomuch that one who knew all the agents which exist at the present moment, their collocation in space, and all their properties, in other words, the laws of their agency, could predict the whole subsequent history of the universe, at least unless some new volition



of a power capable of controlling the universe should supervene. And if any particular state of the entire universe could ever recur a second time, all subsequent states would return too, and history would, like a circulating decimal of many figures, periodically repeat itself. \* \* \* \* \* And though things do not really revolve in this eternal round, the whole series of events in the history of the universe, past and future, is not the less capable, in its own nature, of being constructed *à priori* by any one whom we can suppose acquainted with the original distribution of all natural agents and with the whole of their properties, that is, the laws of succession existing between them and their effects: saving the more than human powers of combination and calculation which would be required, even in one possessing the data, for the actual performance of the task.” \* Concurrences form part of the phenomena of nature, and are the logical result of the original distribution and properties of natural agents, and could therefore on the foregoing supposition be predicted. But if they are truly accidental, and if chance be a positive existence opposed to law, it is evident that they cannot be predicted. If casual concurrences are not the effects of the collocation of primeval causes, the logical sequence of events is interrupted, and it would be rash to affirm that, “if any particular state of the entire universe could ever recur a second time all subse-

\* Mill's Logic, vol. i. p. 379.

quent states would return too ;” for this would be to overlook a class of events which are not determined by law at all. If we adhere to the general principle laid down by Mill, we cannot regard casual concurrences as exceptional, but must hold that *all* natural phenomena are the necessary results of a pre-existing condition of things.

Concurrences, therefore, are no more casual than occurrences. Both depend on laws which are permanent within the limits of our observation, and which we are altogether unable to explain. Some co-existences are permanent just as some successions are observed to be uniform ; many are casual, as most events result from a complex composition of forces ; but both might be predicted were knowledge perfect. Indeed we cannot altogether separate co-existences from successions, though we may for a time confine our attention to the one and ignore the other. The idea of the one implies that of the other, and neither can be known without the other. The simultaneous condition of things is determined by laws of causation as well as the successive condition. We are apt to associate causation with succession alone. A result depends not only on antecedent causes, but on contemporaneous conditions. We must view nature transversely as well as longitudinally. An event produces cotemporaneous changes which are felt in the next successions. Causation does not necessarily involve the element of time.

We have said that there is a strong tendency to believe that the disposition of natural agents is accidental, and that law is to be found in successions alone. When we look at cotemporaneous phenomena, we find them disposed in a certain way; but we detect no principle regulating their disposition. We can without any contradiction imagine one part increased or diminished while the remaining parts undergo no change. If this disposition of things have been uniform within the limits of our observation, and if any change at length take place, we are very apt to suppose that it has been caused by some violent interference from without. Hence an alteration in the disposition of things is supposed to afford evidence of the existence of an external agent. If, on the other hand, the disposition of things we are supposed to be observing is pre-eminently variable, we select certain concurrences which attract our attention, and regard them as brought about by external agency.

If now we turn our attention to successions instead of cotemporaneous phenomena and trace the lines of causation in their descent from the past, we are guided by the light of law alone, and never require to call in the aid of external agency. This distinction may be thus explained. In the one case we take into consideration co-existence alone, leaving succession entirely out of view; in the other case we seem to be regarding succession alone, but we are in reality including co-existence

as well. We fix upon some cause in the past which produces a number of co-existing effects. We select one of these effects and we observe it combining with new conditions and producing other effects. We then select one of these and trace it down in a similar manner, and we may repeat the process until we reach the present time. We thus trace a distinct line of descent from the first cause to the last effect, but we have been neglecting some cotemporaneous phenomena and assuming others at every step. The last result is by no means the equivalent of the first cause. That cause has in all probability become widely diffused, its effects at the very first branching out in all directions and commingling with other causes. To trace out and ascertain the exact equivalent of the cause would be a hopeless attempt, but we may obtain a line of descent by selection, though the portion of the equivalent of the first cause in the last result we arrive at may be infinitesimal in consequence of the successive selections. It is owing to this selection of cotemporaneous effects and the observation of cotemporaneous conditions that we are enabled to trace a distinct line of causation. In considering co-existing phenomena we altogether disregard succession, and consequently we fail to trace order or law. In order to understand nature as a system, we must observe both co-existence and succession. Effects are propagated transversely as well as longitudinally. A change

in one phenomenon may alter the disposition of all co-existing phenomena. Its influence may take time to spread, and we may be able to trace it but a short way, as it may very soon be mingled with other agencies and be dissipated or neutralized, but we know that co-existing phenomena are nicely balanced, and that a disturbing cause gradually diffuses itself and introduces a change in the whole disposition of things. A cupful of water withdrawn from one portion of a lake in time affects the level of the water throughout the whole lake.

We have an illustration of the preceding remarks in the distribution and proportional number of the different species of plants and animals. Were we to consider these as co-existing phenomena only, we should see no law or principle in their distribution, and we might very readily suppose it to be purely casual. We know that this distribution continues nearly uniform within the limits of our observation; and when any change does take place, we are apt to attribute it to some violent interference. The distribution is inexplicable so long as we confine our attention to cotemporaneous phenomena, but light begins to dawn upon it, and we cease to regard it as accidental, when we take into consideration the succession of events as well. We see that the present distribution of living beings is not the casual placing together of so many independent things,

but a nicely balanced system, in which each organism has certain relations to surrounding organisms and to the physical conditions amidst which it lives. The slightest change in one produces changes which are gradually diffused, and which through time may alter the disposition of the whole. "When we look at the plants and bushes clothing an entangled bank, we are tempted to attribute their proportional numbers and kinds to what we call chance. But how false a view is this!"\* We see that the existing distribution has been affected in certain respects by past facts in a determinate manner. We may never be able to explain fully this distribution, for we can never have a complete history of the past, or a perfect knowledge of the agencies at work, which are far too numerous and complicated to be traced by human sagacity; but when we observe the influence some particular circumstance has had upon the distribution of life within a certain range and the tendency it has to diffuse itself, we can no longer regard the general distribution of life throughout the world as accidental. We have got hold of a principle; and though we may not be able to trace its action far, we see clearly that this is owing solely to the limited extent of our knowledge. We may not be able fully to explain the distribution of life even in a limited area, but we see causes in operation which, could we fully in-

\* Darwin on the Origin of Species, p. 74.

investigate them, we can readily believe competent to determine it.

It is held that events may concur without being connected by causation, and that some such concurrences may nevertheless be designed. Were we to admit that there are concurrences in no way related by law even through their remotest antecedents, we are entitled to ask those who assert that some are providential, how they distinguish between those that are designed and those that are merely casual. It is obvious that the distinction must depend on considerations foreign to the events themselves. When we find that they invariably concur within the limits of our observation, we establish an empirical law by which we believe them to be related, and we may even succeed in tracing them to a common cause or to co-existing causes. Such concurrences however are not fortuitous. If we can establish no empirical law, and if we fail to discover any causal connexion, the concurrences are to us purely casual. If we believe that God directs all things, we cannot doubt that all accidental concurrences are alike intended by Him. In this sense no coincidences whatever are casual. There are however individual cases which we do not expect to recur, and from which we can infer no general rule. If we say that in some instances they are casual while in other instances they exemplify some rule, we must remember that the rule has not been inferred

from such facts but rests wholly upon other evidence; and if the facts really did conform to the rule, they would not be casual, which by the supposition they are.

Dr M'Cosh distinguishes two classes of casual events, and affirms that certain concurrences unconnected by causation are designed, while others are merely accidental. He favours us with certain rules to enable us to interpret providence, as he terms it, and by which we may determine when a conjunction of events is designed and when it is merely casual. We may believe that it is intended, he tells us, when we discover a moral or a religious tie between the events.\* When events concur so as to reward the good, to oppose and punish the wicked, or when they are believed to promote the cause of true religion or to provide an answer to prayer, we are then entitled to say that the concurrence is designed. The belief that certain events casually combined were intended by God to be so conjoined is thus founded on the antecedent presumption that God promotes what is good and religious by accidental circumstances. We find however when we appeal to experience that this is by no means invariably the case. We find accidental circumstances sometimes favouring the good, sometimes the bad; there is no invariable relation between accident and morals. We are as much entitled to say that conjunctions adverse to mo-

\* See Method of the Divine Government, p. 197.



rality are designed, as that conjunctions favourable to it are intended. We may have a theory of the divine government founded on other evidence which may be satisfactory enough ; but it can receive no support from mere casual events, which are as often opposed to the theory as confirmatory of it. Their conformity with the theory is as purely accidental as their opposition. If we believe that God effects His purposes by means of casual events we shall be sure to interpret our experience by the light of our preconceived notions. We shall not fail to discover coincidences favourable to our views. The mind is predisposed to dwell upon these, and to overlook such as are adverse or to dismiss them as purely casual, forgetting that the selection is founded entirely upon the preconceived notion, and that were the latter different, the former would be different also.

Many events concur which have no immediate causal relation. We may be able to trace each back to certain remote causes without being able to establish even a remote connexion between them. In such cases, their concurrence is to us merely casual, and it is vain to attempt to discover any immediate causal connexion where none exists. However long we observe such concurrences, we shall fail to discover any law. Though we cannot infer any principle from them, we are inclined to bring to their study some imaginary rule or antecedent presumption, and to observe them with the

view of ascertaining what amount of support they give to it. In doing so, however, we very readily allow ourselves to be misled. We interpret nature by our theory, instead of testing our theory by experience. We make the facts conform to the theory, or select only such as do. The events being by the supposition casual, it is highly probable that some will coincide with our theory, and by attending to such and ignoring all others we may readily enough convince ourselves that the theory is correct. Such theories are always imperfect inductions and are often purely fanciful. An immense amount of ingenuity has been wasted in tracing fanciful connexions between events which are merely casually related. All kinds of fanciful theories were assumed and were supposed to give an antecedent probability to certain coincidences which were eagerly looked for. In such circumstances, it would be absurd to expect that experience would be employed to correct or explode fanciful theories or hasty generalizations. Observation was far more likely to suffer from theory than theory from observation. The belief that certain casual events are related, thus arises in a great degree from some antecedent presumption which leads us to expect it; though it may sometimes originate in some remarkable instance of their conjunction, which for some reason or other has made a strong impression on the mind, and has caused them to be permanently associated

in idea. The belief in astrology, necromancy, divination, and other pseudo-sciences and arts, is thus accounted for.

The readiness with which such beliefs may arise and the difficulty with which they are eradicated even when opposed by experience the most adverse, receive ample illustration in the Life of Jerome Cardan, physician in Milan. "He believed that his presence acted as a preventive of all wounds, and that no blood could flow from wounds inflicted in his presence. The former opinion he may have justified by the fact, that in those days of violence he had escaped the sight of bloodshed in the streets; the latter belief he founded on a single circumstance. Since he himself professionally opened veins, it was his further belief that in such instances the flow of blood was owing to a special dispensation."\* Here the exception was admitted, but rather than give up his hasty generalization, he invents a new theory to account for the exception. The influence of some presumed analogy in giving an antecedent probability to certain coincidences is abundantly illustrated. Cardan's bed on one occasion took fire. "The fire was not easily conquered; there was flame with it, and not much smoke, and little harm done. Upon this, Cardan divined that the smoke signified infamy, the fire peril and fear, the flame great and present risk of life. The hidden fire

\* Jerome Cardan, by Henry Morley, vol. i. p. 119.

represented dangerous snares laid by domestics," and so on.\* "He was writing a medical opinion for the use of his patient Cardinal Morone, when a leaf of it fell to the ground. He rose that he might stoop to pick it up, and as he did so the paper, marvellous to behold, lifted by a gentle wind, rose with him and flew upon the table, where it remained fast in an erect position. Jerome called Rodolf to see the marvel, and both saw that the leaf was scarcely stirred. From this he concluded that his concerns would suffer sudden overthrow, but that they would be lifted up into a right position by a gentle breeze of favour."† Such analogies might be formed to accordance with anticipated events, and are so vague and fanciful that it would not be difficult to fix upon some event with which they would correspond. As this subject is interesting in itself, we may be permitted another illustration from a different source. As soon as Courtenay, Bishop of London, was elevated to the primacy, he convoked a synod to condemn the heresies of Wycliffe. "The crisis was great and the muster large. But they had scarce taken their seats when an earthquake shook the city. Some, in terror at the unseemly omen, were for an immediate adjournment of the court. The Primate allayed their fears. "This earthquake," he gravely told them, "did portend a purging of the kingdom

\* Jerome Cardan, by Henry Morley, vol. ii. p. 288.

† Ib. vol. ii. p. 291.

from heresies, for as there are included in the bowels of the earth noxious spirits, which are expelled in an earthquake, and so the earth is cleansed, but not without great violence, so there were many heresies shut up in the hearts of reprobate men, but by the condemnation of them the kingdom was to be cleansed, but not without irksomeness and great commotion.”\* These extraordinary events concurring, it was thought, must necessarily be connected. As the earthquake expressed the wrath of Heaven, it was not unreasonable to suppose that the divine indignation was incurred in consequence of the proceedings they were about to commence. They were relieved by an analogy which connected the two events in a way more favourable to themselves; though the theory the Primate gives of earthquakes looks very much as if it had been invented to suit the occasion.

Such supposed relations among casual events are now justly discarded, because they receive no support from scientific inductions. There is also less inclination to look for them. Even when such coincidences are supported by experience, we can make no progress in their investigation, for we can discover no reason why they should occur. They are facts of observation and nothing more. We may discover more of them, but we can make no advance in the discovery of higher principles. The continual pursuit of them leading to the

\* “Wycliffe and the Huguenots,” by Rev. W. Hanna, p. 127.

attainment of nothing better must have been felt to be very unsatisfactory. Such coincidences are almost always casual; and when we are able by means of science to trace each event to its natural causes, we perceive that the antecedents of the concurring events have no immediate connexion, and we cease to look for any connexion in the events themselves. We not only refuse to credit such connexions in consequence of repeated failures, but we abandon the habit of looking for them.

Those who still assert that some coincidences are designed while others are not, must support the assertion by an appeal to experience. The burden of proof lies with them. Nor is it sufficient to appeal to preconceived notions; it must be shown that the coincidence occurs not only frequently, but more frequently than can be accounted for by chance. This the advocates of the providential character of certain coincidences never do. They tell us that a coincidence is designed when it promotes morality and religion. An accidental circumstance favours a good enterprise, and we conclude that God thus providentially promotes it. A storm disperses the Armada. The storm and the sailing of the Armada have no immediate casual relation, but we are asked to believe that they have a religious connexion. A single case, however, is not sufficient to constitute a rule. If it has been previously ascertained that casual events always favour religion, or even more frequently than they

oppose it, we are entitled to apply this general principle to particular cases as they occur. But no attempt has been made to establish it. Its truth is merely assumed, and the facts which correspond with it are observed, while those which are opposed to it are ignored or explained away. Besides, in this case, as in many others, there is a difference of opinion as to whether the result really was favourable to religion. The Protestant concludes that God favours Protestantism; the Catholic that God merely withdrew his support from the Church for a season because of some remissness in His worship.

Were we to look to accidental circumstances alone we could arrive at no fixed conclusion. We find them as frequently favouring the bad as the good, and if they did not do so they would not be accidental. If we interpret providence by general laws we are relieved from all uncertainty. There may be much that is obscure, but what we do know contains in it nothing arbitrary. We do not believe that God favours good enterprises because some accident happens to promote them, but because the constitution of things is such that good actions harmonize with it; and though the tendency of good deeds to produce beneficial results may be sometimes obscured, as other natural causes apparently fail when they are counteracted, yet it can never be destroyed. It is in the discovery of law that we obtain the true method of interpreting providence. We cannot disregard

the occurrence of events to us fortuitous, nor can we deny that the prosperity and destiny of nations as well as individuals are sometimes greatly influenced by them.

“For a look may work thy ruin, or a word create thy wealth,  
The walking this way or that, the casual stopping or hastening,  
Hath saved life, and destroyed it, hath cast down and built up  
fortunes.” \*

When our observation is much limited in space and time, fortuities appear to us to exercise the greatest influence. Were our attention confined to them, our views of providence would be at the mercy of prejudices, caprices, likings and dislikings, and this is the case with the great majority of mankind. In proportion as we extend our view, the importance of fortuities diminishes; nature, being the manifestation of the divine reason, becomes intelligible to us, and its phenomena admit of only one interpretation.

To the transitional state of opinion at the present time we also owe the tendency to depreciate the advantages which knowledge confers, and to exaggerate the difficulty of foreseeing the events with which we are most intimately connected. Some writers delight to point out that certain phenomena are so complicated and are determined by causes so numerous and variable, that science can never attempt to discover their laws, and that even when all the agents are known their opera-

\* Tupper's Proverbial Philosophy, p. 109.



tion may be so intricate and uncertain as to make it impossible to predict the result. They delight to refer us to mysterious phenomena which science vainly labours to explain, and these they are disposed to regard as peculiarly providential. They arrange phenomena according as they are more or less complicated, and also according as they are more or less removed from the control of humanity; and they see a wonderful significance in the fact that "the objects within the range of man's foresight are placed beyond his power, while the objects within his power lie beyond his foresight."\* We are told that all this might have been very different from what we find it to be. God, it is said, might have constituted nature with a few general laws, or might have arranged them so simply that the result produced by their mutual action could have been in all cases readily foreseen. There is no necessity, it is said, in the nature of things for the less complicated phenomena being the furthest removed from human control, and the more complicated and consequently more variable and undeterminable being the most amenable to control. This is in fact an instance of adjustment for which no reason can be assigned, and consequently a proof of the divine agency; and they take the credit of having discovered the purpose of God in this arrangement. Of course it concerns humanity,—it is to render man dependent

\* M'Cosh's *Method of the Divine Government*, p. 173, fourth Ed.

on his Maker, by limiting his foresight when he has power, and by limiting his power when his foresight is greatest. All this might have been otherwise, they tell us ; but when we argue from what might have been, we may make any supposition, even the most gratuitous, for we know well its possibility can never be demonstrated. We may make a bold scientific hypothesis, but even the boldest may in time come to be regarded as an ordinary fact. We go beyond the province of all sober reasoning when we make suppositions suggested by the imagination alone, and which from the very nature of the case can never be tested by facts. We cannot experiment in world-making ; and it is useless to say that this law might have been different or that adjustment reversed, when we know not what may be involved in the change. Dr Andrew Combe says in reply to a similar supposition—"I can see why a watchmaker makes a watch here and a clock there, because my faculties and nature are on a par with the watchmaker's ; but to understand why God made man what he is, I must have the faculties and comprehension of the Divine Being ; or, in other words, the creature must be the equal of the Creator in intellect before he can understand the cause of his own original formation."\* Such imaginary suppositions can never serve any scientific end, for if the objects of science were of a different order, the methods of science

\* The Life and Correspondence of Andrew Combe, M.D.

might also be different. We cannot reason from our ideas of things to things themselves, more particularly when we can have no opportunity of verifying the correspondence.

Such writers as I have referred to not only tell us that the constitution of things might have been different, but they supply us with the reason for its being such as we find it. It is, as we have said, to keep man dependent and to prevent him becoming proud and disdainful. They are never at a loss to discover a purpose, and this purpose almost always has reference to man. Dr M'Cosh tells us that the general order pervading nature is designed to facilitate our study of it.\* Those who supposed that the sun was made solely to give us light and heat, and that the stars were formed to beautify our sky and to guide our navigators, did what was quite natural in the then existing state of knowledge ; but those who make such assumption of acquaintance with the divine counsels exceed the ancients in their exaggerated representation of human importance, while they lack their excuse. If the final cause of the fortuitous character of so many events is to make man humble, the object of all science is directly to thwart the divine intention, and the success which has attended it must be obvious to all who compare the existing knowledge of the laws of nature and the extent to which the knowledge

\* Typical Forms, p. 430.

has been made subservient to human power and happiness with that possessed in even the best of the ancient civilizations. Instead of being the purpose of the distribution of phenomena, this alleged final cause appears to us to imply a complete misapprehension of the respective tendencies of knowledge and ignorance.

Great as is the number and complication of natural causes, man is not so much at the mercy of accident as might at first sight be supposed, or as such writers would have us to believe. The ultimate known causes of most phenomena are numerous, and though we cannot express their relations to one another by any rule, yet the mere fact that these causes invariably operate according to uniform laws gives a certain degree of regularity to their effects. Besides, a vast number of empirical laws are discovered by observation and induction which are found to hold good as far as we require to apply them. Many of these empirical laws were known and acted upon before the existence of exact science. That fire burns, that wood floats, that water cleanses, that poisons kill, and so on, are examples of empirical laws known even to the rudest people. When scientific methods are employed in the observation of nature, many empirical laws less apparent than these are readily discovered, and our knowledge of such laws must ever greatly surpass, as it in general precedes, that of the causes and conditions on which they depend.

These laws, though not necessarily true in all places and at all times, may be safely calculated upon within the limits of our observation ; so that as far as they are concerned, the more recondite knowledge of the causes on which they depend would not confer on us any additional practical advantages. Empirical laws are more easily discovered than the laws of causation on which they depend, are in consequence earlier detected, and, being of great practical utility, it follows that even imperfectly developed sciences confer great benefits upon mankind.

From the nature and importance of these empirical laws and the comparative ease with which they are ascertained, the knowledge of them is of great service in the business of life. But it is not essential that a law possess absolute certainty, or even the degree of certainty which empirical laws have, in order to be useful in guiding human conduct. Men do not in general act upon a certain knowledge of the consequences that will follow, nor do they provide for events that they can with certainty predict. Knowledge which does not attain this degree of assurance may, notwithstanding, suffice nearly as well for all the practical purposes of life. We may see our way in light which falls short of noonday brightness. We act in the great majority of instances not in the certain knowledge that we shall accomplish such and such ends, but in the assurance that in all probability

we shall do so, and though we may occasionally fail, we are in an infinitely better position than if we were entirely at the mercy of accidents of which we could predict neither the nature nor the time of their occurrence. We are able to arrive at many conclusions, which, though not absolutely true, approximate more or less to the character of inductive laws, and such truths, though falling short of scientific accuracy, are the maxims by which conduct is regulated. Outside the boundary of the sciences there lies this vast field of approximate truths, easily discoverable by natural sagacity, and unsurpassed for importance in the practical guidance of life by the exact deductions of uniform laws.\* Nor are the disadvantages of being sometimes misled so great as might be supposed, for when acting upon probable evidence we do so knowingly, and make provision, so far as we can, for possible disappointment.

Human happiness depends in a great measure on the relations in which we stand to our fellow-men, and the state of civilization of the times in which we live; and it is in these especially that uncertainty prevails. Our actions have often to be regulated by the future conduct of others, but we are unable to predict what that conduct will be. We are also greatly affected by those causes which act upon mankind in the aggregate, and the future social destiny of mankind cannot be foreseen

\* See Mill's Logic, vol. ii. p. 120.

or controlled by us. Our knowledge is the least where our interest is the greatest. Those events which are of the greatest importance are the most uncertain, and science fails where it would confer the greatest benefits. Human actions appear to be so capricious and so unaccountable that they seem to belong to a different order of things, and science has made little progress in reducing them to law; for it is only of late years that its methods have been admitted to be applicable to the study of such facts. Nor could much progress have been effected even had this been earlier admitted, for the simpler and more general phenomena must be understood before we can apply ourselves with advantage to the more complex phenomena of which they are but parts. Accordingly we find that human conduct is in general regarded as arbitrary, and history is in that theological condition from which the other sciences have emancipated themselves, so that it is still considered impious in many instances to ascribe events to natural causes which mankind have been accustomed to consider as the special operations of providence.

Assuming that the methods of science are as applicable to human conduct as to physical phenomena, and that the law of cause and effect is truly universal, we will now make some remarks to illustrate the manner in which science will enable us, partially at least, to overcome the difficulties arising from the

uncertainty of human conduct and the unexpected changes which occur in society. It is frankly admitted that though the laws of succession are as definite and invariable in psychological and social phenomena as in physics, the science which treats of them may never reach the same degree of exactness and perfection as is attained in natural philosophy. A science is perfect in proportion as it enables us to predict the future from observed data and according to ascertained laws. In astronomy the necessary data may be obtained with the utmost accuracy, and all other causes which influence the phenomena are embraced within a few simple and general laws. Accordingly in this science the power of prediction is very great; and even when the calculation required becomes so complicated that, in order to lessen the difficulty, certain minor causes are left out, such causes exercise so trifling an influence, that the prediction, though strictly speaking only approximately true, may be accepted as absolutely so.

The social sciences must fall very much short of this degree of perfection. The ultimate generalizations that have been arrived at are much more numerous and do not embrace all the laws which regulate human conduct. When we attempt to predict how some one will act in particular circumstances, we can never be sure that causes which we did not foresee will intervene to influence his conduct. Even did we know all the external



causes which will influence the individual at any given time, we should, in order to predict his conduct, require to know his character also ; for the same causes influence different persons in a different manner. Now character can never be ascertained with strict accuracy. Even the data we possess cannot be expressed in definite terms. As character is determined by the action and reaction of the mind and the external world, it is impossible we can know all the circumstances which have influenced it during the whole period of the individual existence, nor even though we did know them could we compound their effects. Were all these causes of equal importance, we should labour in vain were we to attempt to unravel the web of human life ; but we soon ascertain that some causes, either from their more constant operation or their greater influence, are of such importance that the minor causes may be disregarded ; and thus we are enabled to make predictions which, if not absolutely certain, possess a high degree of probability. In actual life such knowledge is nearly as useful as absolute certainty. We seldom require to know what will happen at a distant period ; it is sufficient to know what may soon take place. What it most concerns us to know, we can most safely predict. When a short time only has to elapse, there is the less likelihood of causes intervening to modify the course of nature which we observe at the time ; and as that course is deter-

mined by a few great causes, we may predict what is likely to happen soon by investigating the tendency of these great causes in present circumstances, or in circumstances which in all probability will not differ much from the present. It would be futile to attempt to predict what will be the ultimate destiny of a particular nation; — social science can never be expected to reach or even approach such perfection; but it may be quite possible, from our knowledge of general principles and our observation of the present, to predict with some degree of assurance many changes which causes now operating will in a short time effect. Similar remarks apply to some of the physical sciences, and especially to geology. We know most of the causes which are changing the surface of the globe, and, from our observation of their present operation, we can tell what they tend to effect, and what changes they are likely to produce even at a comparatively remote period; but it would be vain to attempt to describe what will be the condition of this globe many millions of years hence, for neither do we fully know all the causes of change, nor have we precise data, nor are we able to calculate the effect the changes we see in progress may have in modifying the action of causes.

The practical advantages of this imperfect knowledge are well described by J. S. Mill, who says,—"It would indeed be vain to expect (however completely the laws of the formation of cha-

racter might be ascertained) that we could know so accurately the circumstances of any given case as to be able positively to predict the character that would be produced in that case. But we must remember that a degree of knowledge far short of the power of actual prediction is often of much practical value. There may be great power of influencing phenomena, with a very imperfect knowledge of the causes by which they are in any given instance determined. It is enough that we know that certain means have a *tendency* to produce a given effect, and that others have a tendency to frustrate it. When the circumstances of an individual or of a nation are in any considerable degree under our control, we may, by our knowledge of tendencies, be enabled to shape those circumstances in a manner much more favourable to the ends we desire, than the shape which they would of themselves assume. This is the limit of our power ; but within this limit, the power is a most important one.”\* And in another place,—“The aim of practical politics is to surround any given society with the greatest possible number of circumstances of which the tendencies are beneficial, and to remove or counteract, as far as practicable, those of which the tendencies are injurious. A knowledge of the tendencies only, though without the power of accurately predicting

\* Logic, vol. ii. p. 446.

their conjunct result, gives us to a certain extent this power.”\*

It should also be remembered that the greater difficulties that attend the investigation of some departments of nature are compensated in some measure by the peculiar suitableness of certain scientific methods.†

Social phenomena, then, are not so capricious as to prevent our attaining a knowledge of general principles and applying them to the guidance of conduct. When they are made the subject of inquiry by our highest intellect, and when those methods which have been so successful in extending the physical sciences are adapted to the investigation of social questions, we cannot doubt but that we shall be able to place the utmost confidence in the anticipated general results of our actions, to trace the causes which have produced particular states of civilization, to apply general principles to the discovery of the great social tendencies of the times in which we live, and to encourage or restrain them, to get quit of many evils to which we are at present exposed from our ignorance, and to provide against others which we find to be inevitable.

When such great general advantages are to be obtained from the study of the laws which regulate social phenomena, we have no reason to regret that we cannot attain such accuracy of prediction as to

\* *Logic*, vol. ii. p. 482.

† See *Ibid.* p. 481.

be able to tell in detail every circumstance which will influence our future lives, or the destiny of the community of which we are a part. And let not theologians look with jealousy on the advancement of social science, as though it tended to foster a spirit of pride and insubordination ; for while mankind are thus delivered from the debasement of superstition and are enabled to perceive their own power and dignity, they are at the same time made to feel that their reason is exercised in discovering the infinite wisdom, and that their power is only available when in harmony with the divinely appointed constitution of things. Why man should have been placed in circumstances in which so much appears to him fortuitous it would be presumptuous in us to inquire, as it is beyond the province of reason to tell why things are established as we find them. Our duty is not the less clear to exercise the reason God has given us in interpreting the order of nature, and to use the power which foresight thus obtained confers in warding off those evils to which we are through ignorance exposed. Nor should we be discouraged by the comparatively little progress hitherto made, seeing that the strength of philosophy has hitherto been chiefly employed in contending against erroneous first impressions, or in party struggles barren of all result.

The influence of the past is exhibited in the strong tendency to regard the divine government

as vindictive. In the preceding chapter, we made some remarks on the prevalent opinion that all evils are penal, including even such as are beyond human control. Addison describes "an old maiden gentlewoman," who was the greatest discoverer of judgments he had ever met with. "She can tell you what sin it was that set such a man's house on fire, or blew down his barns. Talk to her of an unfortunate young lady that lost her beauty by the small-pox, she fetches a deep sigh, and tells you that when she had a fine face she was always looking on it in her glass. \* \* She has a crime for every misfortune that can befall any of her acquaintance; and when she hears of a robbery that hath been made or a murder that hath been committed, enlarges more on the guilt of the suffering person than on that of the thief or assassin."\* This disposition of the old lady is by no means extinct at the present day, nor is it confined to persons in her position. A high ecclesiastical dignitary, as a warning to all who interfered with the papal authority, recently mentioned the fate of Napoleon who had imprisoned a Pope and seized his territory. The Pope was restored to his dominions, but Napoleon died an exile on a barren rock, in consequence, the audience were left to infer, of his conduct to the Pope. We copy the following paragraph from a recent newspaper.—"Sunday was appointed by the Bishop of London as a day of

\* Spectator—Misinterpretation of Afflictions.

prayer for better weather ; but inasmuch as the recent change has almost entirely removed the anxiety that has prevailed respecting the harvest, many of the metropolitan clergy substituted an offering of thanksgiving. Some of them, however, complied with the episcopal request. Among these are the clergy of All Saints, Margaret-street, where also the morning preacher, in speaking of the threatened visitation of famine, attributed it partly to the sin of the Legislature, as he considered it to be, in passing the Divorce Bill, and of the government in not taking effectual steps for suppressing the disturbances at St George's in-the-East."

When the evil is unusual and appalling, and when it follows close upon some sin which is notorious or peculiarly offensive, there is a strong disposition to regard it as a judgment proceeding more immediately and directly from God than the punishments which are the natural consequences of misconduct. We quietly endure many evils to which we are so accustomed as to think them unavoidable ; but when any sudden calamity comes upon an individual or a nation, when famine or pestilence carry off their thousands of victims, even though the aggregate loss be small compared with that arising from common and familiar maladies, the hand of God is supposed to be specially manifested, and every effort is made to appease an offended Deity. Men are not accustomed to identify the ordinary course of nature with the divine

agency; they view nature altogether apart from God, and recognise his operation solely in events which appear to be interpositions. The ordinary evils which we endure, and which may be distinctly traced to our own conduct, are part of the course of nature, and we are disposed to submit to them as unavoidable; while sudden and appalling evils have the appearance of being special interpositions and are believed to be due to a special providence.

In the case of remarkable coincidences, there are few who are able to resist the tendency to believe in special judgments. If the lightning were to select as its victim one of a company of men all apparently equally exposed to it, and if the person selected had shortly before given utterance to an oath or committed some other act of impiety, there are few who would not be disposed to believe that the lightning was God's messenger sent directly to punish the offender. An accident which has happened to a sabbath-breaker is regarded as having a peculiar significance. The same disposition produces a feeling of disappointment when some daring offence is not visited by a sensible calamity.

There is still a strong tendency to regard all natural punishments as retributive. We have already endeavoured to show that among men the institution of punishment has its origin in the passion of revenge; that this passion has for its end its own gratification, and that in the early periods



of civilization it is but little under the control of the moral and intellectual faculties. Punishment partakes largely of the character of vengeance, and though administered in some degree for the benefit of society, it is long before any interest is taken in the criminal himself or any attempt made to reform him. The primitive chief administering justice was regarded as sympathising with the injured individual, sharing his vengeful feelings, and vindictively punishing the offence as if it had been perpetrated against himself. In such a judge as this, we have the type of the generally received conception of God as the divine governor. The highest conception of an earthly judge is only realized when considerable progress has been made in civilization, when the great majority of the community, being released from fear, are enabled to reason calmly on crime and its causes, do not themselves anticipate being exposed to the penalties of the law, and suffer comparatively little from injury committed by those who disobey the laws. In our relation to the Supreme Judge these conditions are never fulfilled ; and we are consequently disposed to regard Him as analogous to the primitive rather than the modern type. We conceive Him as angry and to some extent capricious, at one time overlooking an offence, at another roused to infinite wrath and inflicting the most summary and awful penalties. He is not represented as administering justice according to a well-defined law,

and proportioning the severity of the punishment to the heinousness of the offence. God is the enraged avenger of sin, and consequently all the punishments that are recognised as inflicted by Him are regarded as retributive.

If we are to view God as a Governor from the analogy of the human governor or judge, we ought surely to select as His type the constitutional ruler of advanced civilization, rather than the despot who for his own gratification lords it over some barbarous tribe. If we are to represent God as vengeful, we must surely believe that, as in the more advanced of the human race, His vengeance is under the control of His moral and intellectual nature. If we represent God as indulging in a blind emotion apart from all consideration of benefit to His creatures, we place Him in unfavourable contrast with the human judge, seeking by punishment not merely to benefit society but to reform the criminal himself. There is no possible way, in our opinion, of avoiding this conclusion, without giving up the notion that God is moved by passions analogous to human passions.

Instead of reasoning from the conception of the character of the Supreme Judge, which varies in accordance with the condition of civilization, let us attend to the facts which present themselves in nature. We have, in the preceding chapter, disposed of the case of natural evils which are independent of human conduct, and have endeavoured

to show that they cannot be regarded as punishments without a total misapplication of the term. If we regard only those evils which flow from conduct and are consequently under human control, we shall find that their tendency, when rightly understood, is essentially remedial. On this subject we must limit ourselves to a few remarks.

Man by his constitution enjoys great freedom of action. The conditions of his welfare are however strictly defined. Health of body, for example, can only be enjoyed by fulfilling those conditions which are essential to the proper exercise of all its functions. We have it in our power to neglect these conditions, but pain stands as a sentinel to warn us of our error. We are not born with an intuitive knowledge of these conditions, but require to learn them by experience. We acquire knowledge by experiment, and have to bear the pain which results from certain actions before we can know that these actions are hurtful. In the more complicated cases, our reason is exercised in tracing evils to their sources. Now pain acts a salutary part in warning us of any departure from the conditions favourable to animal life. Were we not warned, we might sustain permanent injury or even the loss of life itself. If all conditions within the scope of human action were alike favourable to health, there would be no need for pain; but in that case there could be no progress. Similar remarks are applicable to the domestic, social, and political con-

ditions of human welfare. The race is capable of progression as well as the individual. Both progress by experiment. The first efforts are rude and imperfect and are accompanied with much suffering. This suffering shows us that we are neglecting certain conditions essential to domestic, social, or political welfare. It is well that we should suffer or we might be contented with things as they are, and thus fall short of the enjoyment of which we are susceptible. Suffering tells us of our mistake, and though we have no intuitive knowledge of the conditions of human welfare, we are endowed with faculties capable of discovering the errors which lead to the evils we endure. It would be no ultimate benefit to be relieved of these evils in some supernatural manner, for it is by struggling with and overcoming them that we attain a higher development.

The earliest organisation of society is simple and rude, resembling the first effort of a child. It affords little scope for the development of humanity and is characterised by many grievous evils. It contains however some elements of good which may be improved, or at least it supplies the conditions that are favourable to the growth of a more perfect system. There is no conscious experimenting in the building up of society, but the effect is much the same as if there were. The evils arising from tyranny and anarchy have been great, but they are remedial. They prove that the society which en-

dured them was far from having attained the best organisation of which it was susceptible.

The different departments of human progress are so correlated that a high degree of perfection cannot be attained in one of them unless a corresponding progress have been made in the others. The best political organisation is not attainable by a society which has made but little progress in morals.

All progress is attained by experiment. At first we act spontaneously, and we thus learn to distinguish between those actions that bring pain and those which confer enjoyment, and are enabled ever afterwards to avoid the former and choose the latter. After we have acquired some degree of knowledge, we make experiments with a definite aim,—being able to some extent to anticipate the result. In both cases, we are liable to suffer, but the suffering is not an absolute evil. It may be said that suffering is sometimes borne when improvement is precluded, as in the case of premature death, and of those who are so habituated to vice as to be incapable of reform. Error or misconduct may in some cases lead to premature death, as the body is so constituted as to yield to a certain amount of strain upon it without suffering complete disorganization, and possesses a restorative power by which it again attains a healthy condition; but if this strain be exceeded, death ensues. In such a case death may be a more benevolent

dispensation than the maintenance of life after the conditions of its healthy enjoyment have been destroyed. It is absurd to ask why the body has been so constituted.

As regards the other instance adduced, we cannot tell why evil should be inflicted when it has ceased to benefit. Habit is on the whole a beneficial institution : that it should form a barrier to improvement in some cases is an incidental result of a general law. The insensibility of the conscience is one of the evil consequences of habitual indulgence in vice, and if not remedial as regards the individual, it acts as a warning to others. It is one of those cases in which a part is made to suffer for the benefit of the whole.

Man is thus hedged in by pain and misery that he may aspire to a state of greater perfection. The condition characterised by these evils is not the highest of which his nature is susceptible ; and by progress, he not only secures immunity from them but also attains a state of higher enjoyment. Such evils are restraints upon the freedom of our action instituted by God himself, and are obviously intended for our benefit. Among these restraints we must include the emotion of resentment and the actions which it prompts. This emotion has been implanted in the human mind by God, and though its direct object is the infliction of injury, its action is on the whole beneficial,—enabling each to preserve certain conditions of welfare from the encroachments of others. We have already attempt-

ed to show how this emotion leads to the institution of government and the administration of justice.

While representing God as a judge we must take care not to overlook those points in which the analogy fails. The human judge with the sympathy of the community inflicts punishment on the criminal, and thus relieves the injured person from taking vengeance himself. He is exercising that restraint upon human action which God designed in endowing each with the emotion of revenge. But God is not one of a community, acting with their sympathy and giving expression to a common emotion for the good of that community. It is difficult even to conceive God to be Himself possessed with the emotion which prompts to acts of vengeance. God cannot be injured in the way one man may be injured by another. At first God was represented as the exact counterpart of man, only more powerful. He has been divested of one human attribute after another till the conception has been reduced to a mere vague abstraction. Man possesses some emotions which are obviously related to his condition here, such as those connected with the structure and physiology of his body. It would obviously be absurd to attribute such emotions to God, and accordingly in our conception of Him, they are now abstracted. The passion of vengeance is suited to a social being such as man, but is perfectly incomprehensible as an attribute of the Deity. God has placed certain

restraints upon human action, and the vengeance of an offended individual is the most powerful of them all; but it does not follow that He is possessed of this emotion Himself. It is one of the instruments of His government, but there is no necessity for supposing that it is the attribute which prompted Him to institute a government at all. It may be said that God may be offended at sin and may punish it, even though incapable of suffering injury from it. If He be represented as punishing sin merely because He dislikes it and without any regard to the benefit of the offender, we give Him a character which does not commend itself to our moral nature. A despot punishes disobedience without any regard to the good of the individual or of society, because he considers his own gratification alone.

It is held by some that God may punish without any view to the reformation of the offender or the good of society, though human governments would not be justified in so doing.\* Man, we are told, is not the avenger of the laws of God, and though he has a delegated power from heaven, its exercise must be subordinated to an ulterior end. The infliction of punishment commends itself to our moral nature, and God is justified in employing it apart from any consideration of benefit to accrue from its use. The propriety of this unconditional connexion between sin and suffering, we are told,

\* See M'Cosh's *Method of the Divine Government*, p. 260.



is recognised even in the punishments inflicted by magistrates, who are not at liberty to punish merely for the good of society, but only when punishment is deserved. The magistrate, however, is never reduced to the alternative of refusing to punish for the good of society an individual who has innocently offended. We cannot conceive a case in which society was likely to be benefited by such an act. It is only when some injury has been intentionally committed that the public interest demands punishment. God has delegated to man the power to inflict punishment, seeing He has bestowed on him the passion of revenge, and has given him an intellectual and moral nature to control it. This is one of the modes by which He restrains human action and secures human welfare. There are other modes, all of which we perceive to be beneficial. If God punishes without any view to reformation, all we can say is that we do not learn it from the observation of His works. It may be believed, because it accords with the character ascribed to God, but we must be allowed to question the correctness of the representation. Human judges, at one time, punished crime without troubling themselves in the least about the fate of the criminal, and too many in the present day inflict injury merely because it gratifies a revengeful disposition. We should not look to these for a type of the divine character. To suppose that God inflicts punishment without any ulterior end is to represent

Him as moved by a blind impulse. Our emotional nature justifies the infliction of pain, but it must be under the control of the reason. We should not be justified in gratifying an emotion by which injury was inflicted on another, unless the intellect and moral judgment at the same time approved of the end likely to be obtained by the indulgence.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CONCLUSION.

M. Huc, in his book entitled "The Chinese Empire," quotes the following story from a biographical notice of Wang-ngnan-ché, a celebrated Chinese reformer, by M. Abel Remusat. "Even the prejudices of the nation to which Wang-ngnan-ché was proud to show himself superior, found a supporter in his antagonist. In the year 1069, several provinces had been visited in succession by a number of terrible disasters; epidemic maladies, earthquakes, and a drought which destroyed nearly all the harvest. According to custom the censors seized the occasion to invite the Emperor to examine if there were faults in his conduct to amend, or abuses in his government to reform; and the Emperor testified his sorrow by abstaining from certain pleasures, music, and fêtes in the palace. The reforming minister disapproved of this homage to old prejudices. 'These calamities,' said he to the Emperor, 'have settled and unvarying causes; earthquakes, droughts, and in-

undations, have no connexion with the actions of man. Do you hope to change the ordinary course of things, and that nature should alter her laws for you?' Sse-ma-Kouang, who was present, did not suffer this speech to pass uncombated. 'Monarchs are indeed to be pitied,' said he, 'when they have near their persons men who propound such theories; they would destroy the fear of heaven, and what other restraint can check their disorders? Masters of all around, they dare anything with impunity, and would give themselves up to any excess; and those subjects who are really attached to them, would no longer be able to excite their better feelings.'"

The religious emotions become so closely associated with certain intellectual conceptions as to be almost identified with them. When these conceptions are found to be erroneous and no longer tenable, the mind has to pass through a transitional state of disquietude, during which there is a struggle between the reason and the force of association aided by the respect paid to everything which has been long connected with religion. The very existence of religion seems to be threatened when the doctrine we have been accustomed to associate with it is perceived to be inconsistent with knowledge subsequently acquired. We may be obliged to relinquish the doctrine before we are prepared to replace it by another more consonant to reason. The religious feelings are apt to share the dis-

credit of the declining faith, if they continue to adhere to it; and if they part company with it altogether, they cease for a time to have any intellectual expression, and their influence in consequence declines. They cannot, however, be completely suppressed, but ever tend to well forth with renewed vigour and demand an intellectual basis. When this basis is supplied, the feelings, becoming gradually loosened from the old conceptions, at length throw them aside, and attach themselves to the new. This is no doubt a work of time, but when the change is accomplished, men soon come to wonder why the old conceptions should ever have been associated with religion, and how it should have been supposed that religion was endangered by the exposure of their error.

The fear of encountering the great and manifest evils of the transitional state aids the natural conservative tendency of the mind in opposing all innovation. If we prove to men who are restrained by fear alone, and who believe that the divine displeasure is manifested in natural calamities beyond human control, that these events can have no connexion whatever with human conduct, we leave them without any restraint whatever. As their conduct has hitherto been determined by the fear of such calamities, they are likely to indulge in every excess when they are relieved from this fear. No restraint is left when this is withdrawn, and it is not difficult to antici-

pate the consequence. It is dangerous to disturb even an erroneous belief. If, however, they have at the same time learned that God punishes transgression by the natural laws which he has established, they are enabled to dispense with the old restraint by finding a substitute more effectual and better adapted to the condition of progress which the change implies.

When the operation of this restraint is experienced, morality is no longer thought to be endangered when natural calamities are shown to have no connexion with human conduct. The evils attendant upon a transitional state of belief arise in a great measure from the abruptness of the change and the want of preparation for it amongst the great mass of the people, and are falsely attributed to those who expose the fallacy of prevailing opinions.

The doctrine that Providence is manifested exclusively by natural law has been objected to on the ground that the doctrine of special interposition is equally necessary as a regulative truth.\* The existence of general law is necessary to prevent man from being absolutely helpless; the existence of providential fortuities is equally necessary to make him humble and dependent. By the one he is encouraged to cherish confidence to himself, and in his own doings; by the other he is made to feel that he is in the power of another, and that

\* See Method of the Divine Government, p. 175.

the blessing of Heaven is necessary to the success of even his best-laid schemes.

We hold that the truth of a principle should be established by satisfactory evidence and not deduced from its supposed beneficial tendencies. If we believe a doctrine to be true merely because we are of opinion that it is likely to have a beneficial effect upon conduct, we have no sufficient security against falling into error. If we first ascertain its truth we may leave it to work out its effects with the utmost confidence. The tendency of a doctrine may seem to us beneficial without being so in reality, or its effect may be relative to certain temporary conditions. The doctrine that great natural calamities unconnected with conduct are expressions of the divine wrath against sin may appear to us to be a very useful restraint, and yet the doctrine may be wholly false. Besides, the good effects which we attribute to an opinion or dogma may be due exclusively to some element of truth which it contains.

In the present instance, we are of opinion that an erroneous estimate has been formed of the tendencies of the two views in question, but we might at once get quit of the argument founded on their supposed beneficial character, by proving that the distinction between natural and providential events is only apparent, and that law prevails in both though it has as yet been discovered only in the former. When this conviction is thoroughly estab-

lished, and when law and order are regarded as the manifestation of the divine intelligence, belief in their universal prevalence has no such baneful influence as has been ascribed to it; but on the contrary is productive of the most beneficial effects, and does not require to be supplemented by any such doctrine as that of special providence as generally understood.

That the tendency of knowledge is to render men proud and forgetful of God is not borne out by experience. The increase of knowledge, instead of leading men to worship their own achievements, has impressed them with a deep sense of their ignorance, of the limitation of their faculties, and of the boundlessness of that divine wisdom which they have been enabled in an infinitely small degree to comprehend. By the growth of knowledge, man has increased his resources; he has made the agencies of nature his servants to do his pleasure; he has delivered himself from many evils, and has been enabled to lessen some which he has not yet succeeded in averting. Has the effect been to render him proud and rebellious? In extending his knowledge and consequently his power, he is exercising the faculties God has given him, and thus fulfilling the divine will. He feels that God is on his side, and he regards the increased resources he enjoys as the rewards which God bestows for the diligent use of the talents with which he has been intrusted. His power is not



calculated to encourage rebellion, for it can only be exercised in conformity with the natural relations of things. He works out his ends, not by creating agencies, or even by modifying existing agencies, but by investigating their laws and by the application of the knowledge thus acquired. Bacon tells us that "nature is only subdued by submission." The natural tendency of this discipline of the mind is to teach us docility,—not rebellion. We cannot create a new force to oppose existing forces, and we can alter natural sequences only in accordance with natural laws. We do not impose laws on nature ; we merely discover laws in nature. The knowledge of nature can never emancipate us from subjection to established sequences, and the more clearly the universality and uniformity of natural causes are perceived, the more vain does opposition to the will of God appear. It is by means of knowledge that we are enabled to profit by the observation of fortuities. They are the evidence to us not of a different order of things, but of the limited extent of our knowledge ; and though many of them may be explained and cease to be mysterious to us, we need never fear lest knowledge, by removing mysteries, should encourage presumption, for the more we know the more deeply we are impressed with the extent of the unknown. Ignorance is far more likely to be accompanied by pride than humility. "Whatever may be said of the pride of science, it is always meek and humble

in comparison to the pride of ignorance." Men are dogmatic and presumptuous in proportion to their ignorance. The philosopher is disposed to suspend his judgment when he encounters a difficulty, and it is through knowledge that difficulties become apparent. The ignorant man does not know that he is ignorant, perceives no difficulties, is ready at all times to pronounce an opinion on any subject, and is perfectly satisfied that his own opinions are right. No one remains in a purely negative state of ignorance, and the want of true knowledge is compensated by an unlimited amount of error and prejudice.

When, on the contrary, fortuitous events alone are ascribed to God, knowledge must necessarily tend to promote pride and a feeling of independence. We are enabled to dispense with supernatural causes when we have discovered the natural relations of things, and the more we know of natural law, we are the less dependent on what we believe to be divine interferences. If fortuitous events alone are regarded as providential and designed for the express purpose of circumscribing human power, to attempt to understand them would be an act of impiety, for they cease to be fortuitous when explained, and the divine intention in contriving them is frustrated. Human power must be regarded as antagonistic to the divine power, so long as we believe that the latter is exercised in interference alone. Man labours

to increase his knowledge and resources ; God<sup>\*</sup> interposes, and thus renders his knowledge unavailable. Such acts of interposition must be multiplied in proportion to the extension of knowledge, otherwise every new discovery would be a triumph over the divine power. Knowledge, in these circumstances, does make man proud and disdainful, as he believes that it enables him to set at defiance the restraints of providence : but it has this baneful effect only when nature is misinterpreted and providence misunderstood. It may be said that whatever may be the progress of knowledge, most phenomena, and those in which man is chiefly interested, will still remain fortuitous, and that there will ever be ample room for the manifestation of providential interferences. This view still leaves knowledge in a position of antagonism to providence, and merely tells us that while opposed, it is able to effect but a very feeble opposition. However much may remain to be achieved, and however limited human resources are felt to be, we are not prevented from regarding every successful effort as a triumph over an antagonistic power.

When fortuitous events are regarded as providential, we are disposed to acquiesce in them and to resign ourselves to our ignorance. We feel ourselves powerless in the presence of events which we cannot control or even predict. The sense of weakness and dependence thus produced is more

calculated to produce superstition than humility. The arbitrary character of the unforeseen events which happen to us, the suddenness of their approach, and the disastrous effects which they sometimes produce, tend to fill the mind with terror, discourage the investigation of natural causes, and thus promote credulity and superstition. "So far as natural phenomena are concerned, it is evident that whatever inspires feelings of terror or of great wonder, and whatever excites in the mind an idea of the vague and uncontrollable, has a special tendency to inflame the imagination, and bring under its dominion the slower and more deliberate operations of the understanding. In such cases, man, contrasting himself with the force and majesty of nature, becomes painfully conscious of his own insignificance. A sense of inferiority steals over him. From every quarter innumerable obstacles hem him in and limit his individual will. His mind, appalled by the undefined and indefinable, hardly cares to scrutinize the details of which such imposing grandeur consists." "The mind is thus constantly thrown into a timid and anxious state; and men witnessing the most serious dangers, which they can neither avoid nor understand, become impressed with a conviction of their own inability and of the poverty of their own resources. In exactly the same proportion, the imagination is aroused and a belief in supernatural interference actively encouraged. Human power

failing, superhuman power is called in ; the mysterious and the invisible are believed to be present ; and there grow up among the people those feelings of awe, and of helplessness, on which all superstition is based, and without which no superstition can exist." \*

The tendency of fortuitous events to produce superstition is of course most apparent in extreme cases, as in the early tropical civilizations and in the ill-educated classes amongst ourselves, whose vocations render them dependent upon influences which are variable and as yet ill-understood. It is however still perceptible, despite the progress of knowledge, amongst the better educated portion of the community, and finds expression in the doctrine that the divine interposition is necessary as a regulative truth, though inadequate and contradictory as a speculative truth. We no longer attribute fortuitous events to invisible powers, but we call them providential, which implies very much the same idea ; for if we mean anything at all by calling them providential, we distinguish between them and events susceptible of a scientific explanation, and connect fortuities more immediately with the divine agency.

It may be said that fortuitous events teach us to rely on the divine protection, and that they do not promote superstition when we have confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God.

\* Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*, pp. 109 and 111.

But if we were surrounded chiefly with fortuitous agencies, without having acquired any positive knowledge or even the disposition to investigate natural causes, we should have no means of acquiring a correct knowledge of the divine character. Confidence in the wisdom and goodness of God is equivalent to a clear perception of the order and harmony of the constitution of things.

We are forced to the conclusion that the doctrine of special providence is unnecessary as a regulative opinion when the constitution of nature is properly interpreted, and that it tends to encourage superstition rather than a sense of dependence. When we regard law as the intelligible manifestation of the divine providence, the belief in its universality has no tendency to produce those baneful effects which have been ascribed to it. On the contrary, it encourages self-reliance, checks presumption, and makes self-confidence compatible with humility.

The view of providence which we have supported has this great advantage, that it reconciles science and religion, and removes the antagonism that must ever exist between them so long as the doctrine of divine interference is maintained. We do not refer merely to the antagonism which is manifested in the adverse views which are derived from Scripture narrative on the one hand and scientific induction on the other, and which so many labour to reconcile by mutual concessions,

adapting the interpretation to the scientific hypothesis and accommodating the hypothesis to the narrative; but to that more generally and deeply felt antagonism between the scientific and theological spirit of which this is but a single manifestation. This antagonism "shows itself everywhere throughout the domain of human knowledge: affecting men's interpretations alike of the simplest mechanical accidents and of the most complicated events in the histories of nations. It has its roots deep down in the diverse habits of thought of different orders of minds."\* Some entertain a positive aversion to science and dread its progress, while others offer no active opposition but manifest no sympathy with its spirit. Science has advanced so far that its results are continually coming into collision with theological dogmas, and scientific habits of thought are being diffused amongst classes of the community who have hitherto been accustomed to view nature in its theological aspect alone. A general uneasiness consequently prevails, and the reconciliation of science and religion is so much desired that it has without much exaggeration been pronounced to be the problem of the age. This antagonism is not only displayed between different classes of men having prevailing tendencies of thought, but is felt in individual minds when the theological and scientific aspects of nature are contrasted.

\* A System of Philosophy. First Principles, by Herbert Spencer, p. 11.

The fundamental doctrine of all religions is the existence of a god or gods manifested in or by nature. There can be nothing opposed to science in postulating the existence of God, for science is simply a knowledge of the natural relations of things, and has nothing whatever to do with questions which lie beyond the province of nature. We may approach the very bounds of knowledge without encountering the question—whence all these natural relations? This question belongs to religion alone, and is not in the slightest degree affected by the progress of science, the answer to it lying wholly beyond its sphere. We may regard the universe in its theological aspect, and embrace within our view the whole realm of science, however much it may be extended. There is no single natural relation but may readily be conceived to be susceptible of scientific explanation; but there can be no scientific explanation of natural relations as a whole.

We postulate a Deity to explain a difficulty which science cannot attempt to solve; but the dogmas we deduce from this assumption, or which cluster round it, are not equally beyond its range. God is represented as an agent, and in the primitive belief every phenomenon was regarded as the act of some indwelling personality. At this time, science and religion were not differentiated; the religious conception of an event was identified with its scientific explanation, and all nature was divine.



The antagonism between science and religion arose when the simpler natural uniformities were observed, and a distinction was made between natural and providential events,—the former comprising the natural course of things upon which the divine agency operated, the latter all that was mysterious, irregular, and unpredictable, these being supposed to be the characteristic features of the results of that operation. God was not represented as intelligence manifested in the order and harmony of nature, but as an Agent interfering with the natural relations of things. The divine agency was just an exaggerated form of human effort, and as the latter was displayed in the changes it effected on the external world, the former was seen in every event that was unusual or appeared to be above or contrary to the operation of natural causes. The superiority of the Deity consisted in the possession of a power which could control at will all natural agencies. Accordingly we find that religion has hitherto been found invariably associated with the supernatural as opposed to the natural. Men have ever been ready to worship what is rare or opposed to the common experience. The Deity being supposed to manifest himself by interposition, the more wonderful an event was, it was the more characteristic of the divine operation. No event could be too extravagant for human credulity, if it were ascribed to God; no doctrine too absurd to find acceptance, if believed to have been supernaturally

communicated. All religions abound in prodigies and oracles, signs and wonders, prophecies and legends. The Jewish religion and the pagan religions do not differ in this respect. In the Roman Catholic Church we see miracle and religion closely allied. The laws of nature bend like twigs to the blast in the interest of the faithful. Whatever is believed to possess miraculous power is sacred, and whatever is regarded with veneration is believed to be endowed with a supernatural virtue. Most religious dogmas are based upon miracle, and miracles are believed to have been wrought in attestation of their truth. The imagination has been allowed to run riot on all subjects connected with religion, and the wildest dreams it has ever originated have been accepted as sober religious facts. The emotions of wonder and fear have hitherto had almost unrestrained influence, and have moulded the intellectual conceptions; while love, the other emotion which goes to make up the complex religious sentiment, has had a later and feebler development. Wonder and its ally fear being the dominant religious feelings, found expression in the most extravagant conceptions, and gave rise to an unbounded credulity.

Religion is associated not only with violations of natural law, but also with fortuitous as opposed to uniform and predictable events. Though it may not be positively affirmed that variable and irregular events have no necessary relations to antecede-

ents and consequents, yet it is easy to ignore relations that do not obtrude themselves, and to regard such events as individual acts, having no mutual relations except their common connexion with their author. There is a disposition to view them as providential because they *appear* to be isolated, their natural relations being unknown. The prevailing habit of thought thus continues to find expression, even after considerable progress has been made in the discovery of natural uniformities.

So long as religion is identified with dogmas which express the belief that God is manifested in interpositions alone, it is obvious that its spirit must be wholly antagonistic to the scientific spirit. Religion delights in the exhibition of power controlling and interrupting natural forces and ascribes it to God; science delights in tracing uniformity and order throughout the whole of nature. To science there is no essential distinction between uniform and fortuitous events. The boundary line separating them is continually advancing as knowledge progresses, the mysterious losing its mystery, and the irregular its apparent lawlessness. Fortuitous events are found to have necessary relations to antecedents and consequents; their isolated character disappears, and with it their special significance. They appeared isolated merely because they were inexplicable in the existing state of knowledge, and not because of any essential distinction. But as the mind cannot rest satisfied in the con-

dition of absolute ignorance, it demands some explanation; and the imagination supplies some vague analogy which accords with the religious feelings. When the true connexion is discovered, this analogy is found to be inapplicable, and must be dismissed. The special relation to man suggested by the prevalent views of divine providence is generally found to be inconsistent with a wider connexion. Death, for example, which so powerfully excites the imagination, is generally regarded solely as a punishment for sin, because it is thought of in relation to man alone. When considered, however, as prevailing throughout the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and during unnumbered ages before man existed at all, as being implied in birth and development, in nutrition and gradual decay, in the instincts of animals, in the love of the sexes, in maternal and paternal joys and cares, and in the gradual preparation which in old age announces its approach, we can no longer regard it as a punishment alone, if at all, but as a divine institution which serves wider purposes in the economy of nature.

Mysterious and fortuitous events alone being regarded as providential, the extension of science necessarily narrows the domain of providence and tends to absorb it altogether. When the causes which produce them and the laws of their action are discovered, they cease to be providential, and become simply natural; and were all such events

to be successfully investigated there would be nothing left in which the divine agency could be manifested. Hence all those who identify religion with the prevalent dogmas, look with suspicion upon science, and fear lest it should eventually so restrict the sphere of divine manifestation as to endanger the very existence of religion. "But after all this mangling and disfigurement of *Nature*, if it happens (as oft it does) that the amazed Disciple coming to himself, and searching leisurely into *Nature's Ways*, finds more of *Order*, *Uniformity*, and *Constancy* in Things than he suspected; he is of course driven into *Atheism*: And this merely by the Impressions he received from that preposterous System, which taught him to seek for DEITY in *Confusion*, and to discover PROVIDENCE in an *irregular, disjointed World*."\*

If science leads to atheism, it is not because of any inherent tendency in science itself. The antagonism that has hitherto been exhibited between science and religion, and which has tended so much to obstruct the progress of the former and to bring discredit on the latter, has its roots in the dogmas which have been so generally identified with religion. So long as we believe that God manifests Himself in interfering with and disposing at will natural forces, we shall be prepared to see indications of His presence in what we believe to be violations of natural law, in irregularities and

\* Shaftesbury's Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 336.

convulsions, in rare and anomalous events, and even in common fortuities, and will oppose and regret any restriction by science of the sphere of His manifestation.

If, on the contrary, we believe that the Divine Intelligence is manifested in the order and harmony of the universe, science ceases to be the antagonist and becomes the handmaid of religion. We cease to look upon convulsions and fortuities as in a special sense the immediate operations of Deity, and it is no longer an act of impiety to investigate their laws. The belief in miracles disappears when we give up expecting them. Though all events are equally providential, providence is only understood by us so far as we can trace law. In this case, the progress of science, instead of limiting the sphere of the divine manifestation, indefinitely extends it. "To whom therefore the Laws of this Universe and its Government appear just and uniform; to him they speak the Government of one JUST-ONE; to him they *reveal* and witness a God."\* We can never hope to understand more than a small portion of the universal harmony. Many phenomena will ever appear wholly inexplicable; while others, whose relations we can trace in part, will appear anomalous. Reasoning from analogy, we believe even these to be providential; and while we hope to obtain an explanation of many phenomena at present un-

\* Shaftesbury's Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 334.

intelligible to us, we are at the same time deeply impressed with the finitude of our powers and the limited extent of their attainments. "When our opponents triumphantly bring forward inexplicable events, we can reply to them :—In common with us, you cannot understand these events, but you fancy you understand them ; you believe that you are initiated into God's decrees, and speak accordingly : we know that we do not understand them, and openly declare it."\*

External nature teaches us but little directly of the attributes of God. It is through the internal consciousness that God is known, but it is by means of knowledge that the consciousness attains its highest development. "All our affections, desires, and emotions would remain the same from generation to generation (as long as our external world remained the same), were they not modified by the acquisition of new truths or new thoughts."† Knowledge therefore not only enables us to perceive more clearly the divine intelligence as manifested in natural law, but it developes the human intelligence and refines and elevates the emotions ; and as God can only be known to us as a reflection of our own minds, the higher the development we reach through knowledge, the more elevated will be our conception of the Divine Being. Religion is therefore benefited by knowledge both directly and indirectly ; but the religion which is thus pro-

\* Oersted's *Soul in Nature*, p. 178.    † Thorndale, p. 568.

moted is such as will correspond with the higher emotions and the information attained. The religion that has hitherto prevailed has consisted chiefly of wonder and fear, and its dogmas have given an intellectual expression to these emotions. The other faculties were dissociated from religion altogether; and religious dogmas, having been framed without any reference to them, are felt to be repugnant to more highly developed minds, and lose their influence as wonder and fear lose their predominance. Intellectual and moral development elevates religion, and places it on a broader basis by demanding a creed which will satisfy all the faculties, and which will not contradict the knowledge acquired; but it tends to destroy the influence of those dogmas which appeal exclusively to certain emotions no longer predominant.

It may be questioned whether the religious emotions will not in these circumstances suffer in intensity. As the moral and intellectual nature is developed, the emotions which in more primitive times were most exercised are less called forth by circumstances and are less exclusively indulged. Man feels less terror in the presence of nature, in consequence of the knowledge he has acquired of natural relations, and the consequent ability to protect himself from uncertain and destructive agents. The intensity of revenge in early times is scarcely conceivable by those who enjoy the benefits of justly administered law



and an improved social organisation. In the absence of knowledge, the most intense wonder is excited by the rare and exceptional. Science substitutes for this rude but absorbing emotion, a more refined if less intense sentiment. Indeed, the antagonism between science and religion as generally understood is owing very much to this tendency of science. The wonder which has hitherto been associated with religion has the marvellous for its object. Science shows that there is nothing marvellous, in the sense of being at variance with the laws of nature, and thus seems to be opposed to religion which delights in the marvellous in consequence of its being supposed to be allied to the supernatural. "When the savage sees the flash of European fire-arms, he kneels as to a god, but when he has learnt their use, his new religion is gone. Science is every day converting the religion of mere wonder into Atheism."\* Religion is naturally allied to mystery, for the great problem of religion is the most mysterious that can engage the human mind; but it is a mystery *beyond* not *in* nature. In nature, there are unknown relations but no real mysteries. The unknown belongs to the same system of things as the known. There is nothing in nature which is not susceptible of scientific explanation, and the new laws that are discovered are never found to be at variance with the old.

As the emotions which were chiefly exercised in

\* F. W. Robertson's Sermons

early times become less intense, we may expect to find the religious sentiment, so far at least as it is composed of these emotions, to become less intense also. The loss in intensity is however amply compensated by greater variety and refinement of feeling. Certain emotions acquire ascendancy in uncultivated minds, not so much perhaps on account of their superior intensity, as the weakness of the resistance they encounter in consequence of the undeveloped condition of the faculties generally.

With diminished intensity in certain emotions and with a more highly developed moral and intellectual nature, we acquire more abstract conceptions of the Divine Being and the mode of His operation. In the primitive creeds the divine nature is assimilated to the human, and whether the divine personality was supposed to exist unseen within the phenomena or was realized in some ideal form without, the divine agency was conceived to be the same as the human. Now the more personal our conception of God is, the more distinct and influential it is. No abstract principle apart from its concrete application ever strongly moved mankind, and we may refine upon our conception of God in order to make it as we suppose more consistent with our reason, until all sense of individuality is lost. We cannot thoroughly appreciate the divine care unless we represent God as interposing to perform acts which have exclusive reference to ourselves. This is the only care of which we

have any experience. It is alien to our habits of thought to conceive any other, and consequently we find it difficult to form any representation of providence at all without identifying the divine mode of acting with the human. There is a vital truth expressed in the ordinary conception of providence. The form in which it is expressed may be inadequate and even erroneous, but it is the only form the great majority of mankind are capable of appreciating or even of understanding; a higher form demands a higher culture. The truth embodied is in reality much grander than it is conceived to be; providence is more perfect and more wonderful than we imagine. The highest conception however is the most abstract; and the most abstract is the most difficult to realize, and consequently the least influential.

The intensity of the emotions is in the inverse ratio of their extension. The man who looks upon God as a power interposing directly to bring about events without any consideration of natural antecedents or consequents, has his feelings intensely roused when the occasion presents itself, but these fits of excitement are followed by a period of indifference, and nature is in general contemplated as something altogether apart from God and in no way manifesting His presence. When, on the contrary, all events are regarded as alike providential, nature ceases to be a lifeless, mechanical thing, and acquires a spiritual sig-

nificance. The emotion with which we contemplate it, however, being equally diffused over the whole, will never acquire that degree of intensity which is produced by the occasional observation of what is believed to be a direct supernatural interference.

The higher views of providence which a more advanced culture demands appear cold and comfortless to those who are unable to appreciate them, and who feel no dissatisfaction with the older and more concrete conceptions. They cannot understand how God can provide in the most perfect manner for the individual by means which are not temporary expedients. They regard the divine care as something superadded to the natural course of things, as the aid of a friend co-operates with their own efforts or supersedes them; and if God is not represented as exercising his providence after this manner, He appears to be wholly indifferent about their welfare.

When the representation of providence to which we have been accustomed is felt to be repugnant to our conviction of the universality of natural law, we should endeavour to reconcile our conduct and feelings to the more abstract conception of providence forced upon us by scientific habits of thought. When in distress our natural desire is that God may interfere to deliver us, but this desire should conform to our reason, which teaches us that the means of deliverance, if they

exist at all, can be no other than established sequences. Why should we expect God to perform a special act on our behalf? We may enjoy God's love without favouritism. Our desires ought to be directed and restrained by knowledge. Sometimes the emotions may be so strong as to blind the judgment, making us for the time irrational. When the violence of the emotion has passed away, reason resumes its sway, and we are taught to seek deliverance through the natural means which God has appointed. When a man is saved from shipwreck, the sentiment of gratitude naturally arises within him. To what is he indebted for his life? Not altogether, we shall suppose, to his own exertions nor to the aid of others. He ascribes his delivery to God, who must have interposed in some special manner to save him. He probably fixes upon some apparently fortuitous circumstance to which he owed his life, and viewing it in relation to his own case alone, he is apt to suppose that it must have been designed for the special purpose of procuring his safety. Gratitude in such a case is associated with the idea of special divine interposition. Had the fortuitous event been foreseen and intentionally taken advantage of, gratitude, according to this view, would have been precluded. It is only due to God when deliverance is effected by accidental causes. If we regard deliverance from accidental causes as a favour, we must regard injury in similar circum-

stances as a punishment, though for what reason it is difficult to conjecture. We may feel grateful for delivery from danger, though we believe it to have been effected by natural means alone, and we may very properly ascribe our delivery to God, though there have been no special interposition on our behalf. Though our safety may have been secured solely by our own exertions, there is still occasion for gratitude to that Being who has so constituted nature that consequences can be foreseen, and who has given us faculties capable of acquiring the knowledge necessary to anticipate them.

The view of providence which we have given is favourable to morality as well as religion. It recognises the fact that immorality and evil are causally related, and that consequently sin cannot go unpunished. According to the opinion most generally entertained, the punishment of sin is arbitrary, and frequently remote, or even deferred altogether till the future life is entered upon. There is, it is believed, no necessary connexion between the offence and its punishment,—the time and manner of its infliction depending solely on the sovereign will of God, and being thus incapable of prediction. We are disposed to think that this view encourages men to hope that their conduct may be overlooked, or to believe that the punishment of their offences may be indefinitely deferred. After education, nothing tends more powerfully to repress crime than the certainty and rapidity of jus-

tice. Most crime is committed in the hope that it will not be detected. Punishment would be a more powerful restraint if its infliction were known to be certain, and if no hope of escape could by any possibility be entertained. It may be said that the punishment of vice is certain at last; but men are naturally improvident, and readily sacrifice their future happiness to immediate and transitory enjoyments. The remote is vague and somewhat uncertain, and has little influence upon present conduct. We look but a short way before us, and are chiefly moved by evils which immediately threaten us and by pleasures which will soon be enjoyed. We regard only immediate effects, and are indifferent about remote and uncertain consequences. Besides, if we believe that vice is committed with impunity in this life, what reason have we for supposing that it will be punished in the next? We can only judge of the divine providence from what we observe, and of the future from the present. The existing method of providence is certainly more likely to be continued than reversed in the next world. It may be said that the certainty of future punishment rests on revelation, not on observation. Revelation, however, presupposes belief in the existence of God; and a moral Deity implies providence or a moral order in creation. If therefore we believe in the existence of a moral chaos, in which virtue is constantly meeting with trials and disappointments, and in which vice is

frequently prosperous and triumphant, we destroy the very basis on which our belief in revelation rests. The doctrine that punishment is arbitrary and uncertain in this life is not favourable to the belief in a more perfect scheme of distributive justice in the next, nor consequently to morality itself; for if moral disorder prevail here, the probability is that it will prevail hereafter; and if it be said that we have assurance of the contrary, the admission of moral disorder is inconsistent with the grounds of that assurance.

The view we have given of divine providence in this department of nature is therefore more favourable to the practice of morality, than the belief that punishment is an arbitrary infliction having no necessary relation to the offence that provokes it. The punishment of sin is represented to be certain and unavoidable even in this life. There is no chance and there can be no hope of escape. The laws which connect sin with its punishment are as certain as other established laws of nature. The consequences of some particular offence may vary with the circumstances in which it is committed, but its tendency to produce evil is invariable. Nor is the evil to be dreaded remote. The outward consequences of an immoral act may manifest themselves long after the act has been committed; but its inward effects upon the moral nature are as immediate as they are disastrous. Besides, belief in the prevalence of moral order is



by no means inconsistent with belief in a future state, but simply affords a presumption that the course of providence begun here will be continued and perfected hereafter.

It may be said that the advantages of rapidity and certainty in the infliction of punishment are more than compensated by the terror inspired by uncertainty and occasional extreme severity. There is no emotion we can take advantage of to secure obedience so powerful as terror. It exercises a commanding influence on the will, rouses our utmost efforts, and the circumstances that occasion it become indelibly imprinted upon the memory. The belief that God occasionally interposes to punish sin by some great physical calamity is eminently fitted to inspire terror. It implies constant exposure to the divine wrath without any certainty regarding the time of its manifestation. No limit can be set to that wrath, or to the severity of the punishment that may be inflicted. Obedience may thus doubtless be secured; but it is the obedience of superstition, and superstition is not favourable to moral culture. The dominant attribute in the character of God to the superstitious is power, justice and truth being regarded as subordinate. To regard power alone in a superior, and to obey from a mere dread of its arbitrary exercise, are indications of the very lowest condition of the moral sentiment. It is certainly better that obedience be paid from a base motive than

that there should be no obedience at all ; and we cannot doubt that it is more effectually secured by terror than by the consideration of a definite penalty. The higher motives of love and esteem for the person obeyed and of regard to duty for its own sake may in the course of time be added to the primary motive, and may ultimately in a great measure supersede it. The primitive form of conscience may constitute the cell within which from a new nucleus a higher form may be developed ; but the development involves the destruction of the parent cell. Moral progress cannot coexist with a slavish spirit of obedience. The motives furnished by rewards and punishments may never be altogether dispensed with, and may continue at times to influence those who follow virtue for its own sake ; but a state of servile dread is wholly inconsistent with a high moral development, for perfect love casteth out fear.

Terror produces obedience ; but while under its influence, we necessarily form an erroneous conception of the Divine character and will. God is supposed to inflict evil upon man for the purpose of enforcing His will, and if we have made a mistake as to what that will really is (which we may readily do, seeing that we do not admit that there is any necessary connexion between our offences and their punishment), we may be impelled by the strongest of all motives to do many things which, so far from being right, may be positive violations of moral

law. In this way our natural feelings even may be vitiated; and "many things the most horribly unnatural and inhuman, come to be received as excellent, good, and laudable *in themselves*." We may ascribe to God commands which imply partiality, malignity, and revenge; and though we may naturally detest these qualities, we shall soon become reconciled to them when we find them displayed in the supreme object of our worship. When our attention is directed solely to power, we are apt to suppose that virtue is such merely because God has so commanded, that there is no such thing as justice and truth independent of power, and that the only ground of obedience is the power to enforce it. The emotion of terror acts so strongly on the will that obedience is produced as a necessary and unavoidable result. There can be no moral freedom and consequently no virtue when the will is irresistibly constrained. A high moral condition implies the power of balancing motives and the voluntary choice of the path of duty; but this power cannot be developed when the will is habitually ruled by an overwhelming emotion. We cannot be moral agents with a sense of responsibility unless we feel that we could resist the influence of our emotions even in yielding to it; otherwise we are merely their slaves, and our conduct is determined for us, not by us. Besides, terror so absorbs and unhinges the mind as to prevent it attending to other motives, or receiving im-

pressions unconnected with the objects and circumstances which excite terror. A state of constant exposure to danger, the nature and extent of which is unknown, is therefore very unfavourable to moral and intellectual development. Obedience is produced only when the mind is under the influence of terror, but no intense emotion can be permanently endured. Those who are accustomed to act from fear will be likely to indulge in every excess when relieved from this restraint; and accordingly we find idolaters at one time prostrating themselves before their idols, at another, upbraiding or insulting them. While the calamity which men interpret as the expression of the divine wrath weighs upon them, they are crushed in the dust and will submit to do anything, however humiliating or even unnatural, in order to propitiate the divine favour, but as soon as they are relieved from its pressure, they recover confidence; and if the recurrence of the infliction is long delayed, this confidence very readily passes into presumption and impiety.

The superstitious view of punishment represents flagrant crime only, or a long-continued course of crime, as rousing the divine vengeance to some sudden and appalling infliction. It also directs attention solely to physical evils, and produces the impression that they are the only punishments which transgression entails, overlooking the less

sensible but infinitely more important evils which sin inflicts upon the mind itself.

In the view we have given of punishment, we are supplied with a powerful motive to obedience in the penalty which every offence is known to incur ; but in addition to this, virtue receives a strong support in the intelligent conviction of its reasonableness. A child may be taught to obey commands simply because they express the will of his parent ; but it is well that their reasonableness should be explained to him as soon as he is capable of comprehending it. You thus obtain a more intelligent obedience, and you add a new motive to secure it. The knowledge that he is fulfilling a reasonable end need not displace regard for the parent's authority. On the contrary, it tends to enhance it, and the notion that children should be kept in ignorance of the objects of the commands of a parent in order to promote docility has happily fallen into disrepute. When we arrive at an intelligent conviction that moral rectitude alone is consistent with human welfare, to do wrong is felt to be an error as well as a sin. " We must take into consideration that man, even when he is led away by his passions, and forgets his reasonable nature, cannot entirely dissipate the influence which the reasonable connexion of the world must have on him ; the evil that he does, and even the evil that he thinks, brings him in opposition with his own nature, and

with the whole of existence, however much he may endeavour to hide it from himself. Whatever is sin, in a religious sense, is folly, in a true perception of the word." \*

The view of providence we have supported represents the laws of nature to be the expression of the will of God, and consequently to act in accordance with them becomes a religious duty. The common opinion tends to dissociate nature from God, who is represented as standing apart, viewing the machinery of the universe rolling on, and manifesting Himself, not through natural forces and mental faculties, but in physical interpositions and supernatural inspiration. It even represents nature and the human soul as completely disordered,—the mere wreck of a once perfect institution. What we are taught to despise, we have no desire to study; and it is easier to say that a thing is disordered than to apply our minds to investigate it. It is of the greatest consequence to our welfare that we should direct our conduct by the laws of nature; but as these laws are not regarded as a manifestation of the Divine will, to do so is looked upon merely as a matter of prudence. When men suffer from ignorance or neglect of natural laws, the lowest considerations of selfishness are urged to induce them to attend to them. The will of God is supposed to be manifested only in commands supernaturally revealed; and religion

\* Oersted's *Soul in Nature*, p. 120.

is employed to enforce them alone. Many of these commands have a natural basis, though they are not considered obligatory on this account. It must be acknowledged, even by those who accept these supernatural commands, that it is also necessary that we should conform our conduct to the laws of nature which are not supernaturally revealed but are discovered by human intelligence. With these last however religion is believed to have no concern; and its sanction is thus lost for the enforcement of many duties of the greatest importance. Religious sentiment is entirely withdrawn from the acts of common life, and is associated only with a limited class of duties and exercises. Even the moral laws are frequently dissociated from religion, and the belief that a supernatural revelation is necessary to sanction them tends greatly to perpetuate this error. The power and presence of God is acknowledged only in that which is believed to be supernaturally conveyed to us from without, never in that which originates within.

The current religious dogmas address themselves to the spiritual part of man's nature alone, and are in consequence totally ineffective in restraining or removing evils which depend upon physical causes, which these dogmas entirely ignore. By the arrangement of the divine providence, certain natural conditions are necessary for the development of moral character, and only by fulfilling

these conditions are we entitled to expect this result: Knowledge is necessary to enable us to avail ourselves of the advantages which may be attained by fulfilling these natural conditions, and this knowledge is afforded by science which is ignored and even opposed by the prevailing religions. To enjoy health, for example, we must know the natural conditions favourable to health. To succeed in business, we must act in accordance with the ascertained laws of political economy. To attain a correct moral character, we must have regard to the natural conditions, physical as well as mental, which favour its development. Our conduct in all such cases must be regulated by the laws which have been discovered in these departments; and as these laws are divine institutions, it is a religious duty to ascertain them and act upon them. The success which is thus insured us is the gift of God, inasmuch as it is part of the order established by Him; and it is at the same time the work of man, for it is obtained by his intelligence and labour. Man thus attains his highest well-being by active and intelligent submission to the Divine will.

The prevalent view, as it teaches men to despise and ignore nature, also inclines them to distrust it. We are told that we may use the means, but must hope for success only through the divine blessing upon them. Natural laws may fail us unless some supernatural influence comes to our



aid. The view we have supported teaches us that the blessing of God is not something which is added to insure the success of natural means, but that it is to be found invariably in the use of the means which He has appointed. The laws of nature are constant, and we have no reason to distrust the success of means naturally fitted to effect the object we have in view. If we employ insufficient means we have no right to expect that God will accomplish our purpose, notwithstanding their inadequacy. There is as much superstition in asking the blessing of Heaven to give effect to our exertions after we have done our utmost, as in asking God to grant us our wish whether we make any effort or no.

The view of providence we have supported may be shown to reconcile religion and action, as we have already endeavoured to show that it reconciles religion and science. According to the prevalent opinion, the blessing of God is supposed to attend the efforts of those only who believe and worship aright. It is therefore of more consequence, even as regards our secular interests, that we should believe a certain creed and perform religious services, than that we should conform our conduct to the laws of nature. Such a view cannot but have a depressing effect upon human effort, and thus leads naturally to fatalism. Besides, the evils we suffer because of our sins are regarded as differing essentially from ordinary

natural events, and are supposed to be brought about by the more immediate agency of God. To attempt to mitigate, or remove such evils would be to oppose the Divine will, and would be futile as well as profane. No natural means could be expected to influence events which are independent of all natural relations. We can only expect to succeed in removing them by influencing the Divine will, and hence we are led to propitiate the favour of Heaven by those means which in similar circumstances are found to be successful with fellow-mortals. The natural means of removing evil and of securing our safety are disregarded, and deliverance is expected as a special favour from God. Religious feeling is thus divorced from action and is exercised in propitiation alone. It is not deemed a religious duty, but simply an act of prudence, to employ the means naturally fitted to secure the object of our desire; it is a highly religious exercise to pray to God to give us what we wish, whether we work for it or no.

Knowledge is essential to successful action, and the result we aim at cannot be expected, unless we know and use the means naturally calculated to effect it. The common conception of providence not only discourages the use of natural means, but has in too many instances led to the commission of deeds of the greatest injustice. Men differ regarding the services that are pleasing to God; many think the extirpation of heresy to be one of them.

When a public calamity happens, it is regarded as evidence of the divine displeasure, and the extermination of heretics, being esteemed the greatest service that can be rendered to God, is prosecuted with a zeal proportioned to the magnitude of the impending evil. Superstition has in this way sacrificed many innocent victims.

The belief in the providential nature of evil discourages all inquiry into its cause, and thus prevents the acquisition of knowledge, which is an essential pre-requisite in all attempts to effect its removal. As it is impious to inquire into the causes of natural evils, it is equally impious to refuse to submit to them; and resignation is a virtue, even though there has been no effort to remove them. H. T. Buckle has shown that the strong religious sentiment aroused by belief in the supernatural character of serious dangers leads not merely to submission, but actually causes them to be worshipped. "Indeed, so far is this carried," he tells us, "that in some countries the inhabitants, from feelings of reverential fear, refuse to destroy wild beasts and noxious reptiles; the mischief these animals inflict being the cause of the impunity they enjoy."\*

This antagonism of the common view of providence to scientific investigation and intelligent action is well illustrated in the history of medicine. Diseases were at one time universally believed to

\* Buckle's History of Civilisation, p. 114.

be punishments for sin, and were therefore removed from the category of natural events, and ascribed to the immediate operation of God. The appalling nature of certain diseases, and the fear of death necessarily associated with all diseases, no doubt tended much to encourage this belief. Accordingly we find that priests were the first physicians, and that cures were first attempted by rites and magical incantations. Patients were brought to the temple, and the divinity was propitiated by prostrations and offerings. Many of the heathen gods were famed for the wonderful cures they effected. The priest-physicians of Egypt divided the body into certain portions, each of which was believed to be under the power of a particular demon, who had to be invoked for the cure of diseases which had their seat in the part over which he ruled. In Egypt at the present day disease is "charmed away" by the following method :—Certain passages of the Koran are written on the inner surface of an earthenware cup or bowl ; water is then poured in and stirred until the writing is quite washed off, and the *infusion* is drunk by the patient. The Church opposed the heathen practices not because it disbelieved their efficacy, but because it ascribed it to the influence of evil powers, and the saints took the place of the heathen divinities. It was not in the interest of science that the Church opposed these practices. It introduced no new theory of disease and no essentially different method of cure ; but it held

that the Virgin and the saints were the proper parties to whom to apply for relief. Diseases were ascribed to the anger of God, and their cure was to be sought by propitiating the divine favour through the Church, and by the performance of the religious exercises appointed by it. Even the Reformers did not throw aside these prejudices, so slow is the progress of opinion on this subject. Regarding idiots, Luther said that "they are men in whom devils have established themselves; and all the physicians who heal these infirmities as though they proceeded from natural causes are ignorant blockheads who know nothing about the power of the demon." "Let us then know," says Calvin in his Commentaries, "that it is the only fit remedy for our diseases and other calamities, when we carefully examine ourselves being solicitous to be reconciled to God and to obtain the pardon of our sins." So long as the theological theory of disease prevailed, it would be considered presumptuous in any one to indulge in speculation about a possible natural cause of disease, and thus ignorance would be perpetuated. Those who laboured under incurable diseases were often abandoned because they were believed to be objects of Heaven's wrath. It would be reckoned an act of impiety to cure by natural means what was regarded as the work of a supernatural agent. It was impious even to desire to get relief from a disorder sent by providence no doubt for some wise purpose. Sermons were preached "against

the dangerous and sinful practice of Inoculation." The prejudices of intelligent men of former generations are exhibited by the most ignorant and vulgar at the present day, and we sometimes see vaccination refused because it is considered wrong to interfere with the arrangements of providence.

When natural causes were recognised, they were accepted with little confidence in their efficacy, and were deemed wholly subordinate to supernatural influences. The wrath of God was the primary cause of all disease. It did not require the aid of natural causes, which even when present were inoperative without it. "Even under the papal reign of Innocent III., the physician was interdicted from applying what remedies he had till he had called in the ecclesiastic."\* The alliance of medicine with theology was therefore very unfavourable to its progress as a science.

Divine interposition in our favour would be found to be no ultimate advantage, even did we succeed in obtaining it. The natural constitution of the world is such that in order to attain success we must know and fulfil certain necessary conditions. Suppose we took no trouble to ascertain these conditions or no care to fulfil them even when known, we should certainly expose ourselves to suffering. This would be a matter of little consequence if we could obtain relief by an appeal to Heaven. If we are taught to expect divine inter-

\* Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. 75, p. 636.

ference, it will be a matter of indifference to us how we act. In these circumstances, the person who acts from knowledge has no advantage over one who acts from caprice, or even over one who does not act at all. There is therefore no inducement to acquire knowledge, and the moral training derived from suffering is lost. For the sake of a temporary advantage, we should sacrifice all intellectual and moral growth. The effect would be the same as in the case of indiscriminate charity among ourselves. We teach the recipient of our bounty to rely on external aid, and by relieving his immediate wants we destroy his self-reliance and make him more and more dependent on charity. By fulfilling certain conditions, we can command success, and it is presumptuous in us to ask God to alter the course of nature because we have acted ignorantly or immorally. God is not going to work a miracle to relieve us from the consequences of our blundering and to save us the trouble of thinking. It is hard to suffer, and it is very natural to cry out for relief, but suffering is remedial and delivers us from infinitely greater evils. Through it we acquire knowledge and moral training which render appeals to foreign aid unnecessary. Every victory gained over ignorance and evil strengthens us for more difficult achievements; every temptation resisted enables us successfully to encounter greater trials. We obtain success, not by favour but by effort,—it is not a thing brought

to us, but a thing wrought out by us; we secure immunity from evil by the development of our moral and intellectual faculties.

No one believes that God will invariably respond to our appeals, so that the condition of utter indifference as to the course of conduct to be pursued which we have supposed is never realized. Divine interference cannot be trusted too implicitly: God may, for reasons only known to Himself, refuse to answer the prayers of his servants, and therefore it would be imprudent to act without any calculations of consequences. Men in general act up to the knowledge they happen to possess, and trust to divine interposition to deliver them from those dangers which they were unable to foresee and which they cannot now prevent. Besides it is impossible to shut our eyes to the fact that there is at least a certain amount of uniformity in nature, and that the consequences of our conduct can sometimes be predicted with some degree of accuracy. Cardinal Wiseman says in reference to the cholera epidemic of 1837,—“It would be superfluous to say that every religious act of expiation was duly performed. There were sermons in many churches, exhorting the people to repentance that so the Divine wrath might be appeased and the scourge averted. Then there was a solemn procession, in which the Holy Father walked. But some questioned the prudence of thus assembling crowds together, and the events seemed partly to justify



them.”\* Trained from infancy to believe in divine interpositions, and acting on the supposition that the cholera was a supernatural visitation, they nevertheless found it impossible to ignore the fact that its extension at least was determined by natural causes subject to their control. The very means they were employing to propitiate the divine favour had the natural effect of aggravating the evil they were seeking to get rid of. Surely this was a clear enough intimation to them that evil results from neglect of the natural conditions of human welfare, and that immunity from it is to be sought in compliance, and not in listening to sermons and walking in processions.

Every one must be convinced that certain results are placed within his control, and that he can command these results with some degree of certainty. In these cases his actions will be determined by this conviction and not by caprice. But when we have great difficulty in deciding what line of conduct we shall pursue in consequence of the complicated nature of the case, and our ignorance of the causes which may subsequently interfere to frustrate our intentions; or when the beneficial effects of our acting are uncertain or remote, we are apt to abstain from acting at all, or to yield to some immediate impulse, leaving the result, as some say, to chance or fate, others to providence. The effects upon conduct of belief in

\* Recollections of the Last Four Popes, p. 456.

fatalism are similar to those produced by a constant expectation of divine interposition. No one can be a fatalist who has not a very low conception of the extent of human power. No one will believe that every event is determined and will happen whether he attempt to prevent it or not, who knows by experience that he has power over the course of many events, and that this power is proportioned to his knowledge; and as no one believes that he is absolutely powerless, it is impossible to be a fatalist in everything. We act when the consequences of our action are apparent and certain, but we have not sufficient stimulus to action when they are uncertain or remote, and in such cases we resign ourselves to fate. Indeed, we are inclined to believe that fate is a power which positively thwarts human effort and renders it ineffectual. If the means we employ are not successful, we do not at once conclude that they are not naturally adapted to secure success in the circumstances, but sometimes suppose they have been prevented from producing their natural effect in consequence of the event which they were intended to control having been predetermined. A remedy fails to remove a disease, and we attribute its failure to the fact that the days of the patient were numbered. It is our duty to use the means, but it is vain to attempt to defer the appointed time, and when the cause of death is obvious and controllable, we are told that even had this cause been removed, God

would have employed some other method to effect His purpose.

So it is with those who believe in constant divine interposition. If we believe that human power is very circumscribed, we shall have no desire to attempt much. Though the prevalent views of providence favour inaction by sanctioning the expectation that God will specially interfere to favour us, few will allow their practical judgment to be so far overcome by this dogma as to act upon it consistently; and the religious expectation of divine interposition is in general accompanied by attention to the natural means by which success may be attained. In extreme cases in which the emotions are strongly excited, and when we can apparently do little to aid ourselves, this is neglected; and the Roman Catholic sailor, for example, is sometimes found appealing to the Virgin for safety, while he allows his ship to drift on the rocks without making any effort to save her, just as we find the Mahometan refusing to step aside from danger on the ground that it is vain to attempt to avoid one's fate. Though we may be disposed generally to rely on our own efforts, we are ready to appeal to Heaven for aid when we feel our own knowledge and power to be of little avail. But if we are exposed to danger in consequence of the limited extent of our knowledge and power, we are still bound to employ them so far as they are available, and to use every effort to in-

crease them so as to make them more available. Reason is given to guide us, not only in those cases in which it can be easily applied, but also in cases that are difficult, and in which we can only arrive at an approximation to the truth. We are independent of divine interposition in ordinary cases, and apply for it only in cases of difficulty, as if God had given us reason, but wished as much as possible to save us the trouble of exercising it. We apply less and less for divine interposition in proportion as our knowledge and self-reliance increase, and ultimately cease to believe in it at all.

When nature is regarded as a system of uniform order, and the manifestation of the Eternal Reason, we are led to perceive that the highest well-being is attainable only when our conduct is in harmony with that order, and that evil can only be removed by avoiding its causes. Neither individuals nor nations can prosper without fulfilling the natural conditions of prosperity; and if they do so, they cannot but prosper. To act in harmony with the order God has established, is to obey the divine will, and the highest exercise of religion is by so acting to declare our delight in the divine institutions and our willing submission to the divine authority. The religious sentiment has no essential connexion with supernaturalism viewed as a power violating natural laws, nor with appeals for supernatural aid; but may be associated,

by training, with action in harmony with an intelligent recognition of natural causation.

We build temples and call them sacred, but the great temple is the temple of the universe and the soul of man. We regard miracles as sacred and as affording the only evidence of the divine agency, but all nature as it becomes intelligible to us is a manifestation of Deity, and the only miracle is the great miracle of existence. We esteem certain seasons sacred, but the performance of duty sanctifies all time. We regard a certain order of men as the sole interpreters of the divine will, but God reveals Himself directly to the soul of every one, and "the person of the layman is as sacred as the person of the priest." We look upon certain nations, churches, or individuals, as the special favourites of Heaven, but the providence of God is alike to all, and the divine favour is enjoyed according as the divine will is known and fulfilled. Our conception of religious duty embraces obedience only to commands supernaturally communicated, but the humblest duty honestly performed is as much a religious duty as the most sacred rite. We regard supernaturally revealed truth alone to be religious truth, but truth is sacred not because it rests on external authority, but because it is perceived by the mind itself to be truth. Miracle is no guarantee for truth, and no amount of it would justify us in accepting a lie. No book is

exclusively sacred, for more or less of truth is to be found in all writings, and inspiration is not confined to one caste of priests or one line of prophets. Religion consecrates all nature and time, each person, and every truth and duty. To labour is to pray. "A true life is the wisest philosophy," and "a good life is the only true and beautiful theology."

It is difficult to acquire the habit of viewing nature in its two aspects at the same time,—as known, and as related to the unknown. Man is prone to extremes,—to develope one side of his nature and to neglect the rest. The mystery of the Infinite is as essentially inherent in one part of nature as in another, but much of nature becomes familiar to us, and the sense of mystery would be in danger of being lost, were it not associated exclusively with some portion of nature which we agree to regard as more sacred than the rest, and which thus becomes to us a symbol of that mystery which meets us everywhere. The sensible world necessarily occupies so much of our attention that we are apt to overlook the existence of the Infinite altogether, unless we represent it in some definite form. This form must not differ greatly from the forms with which we are familiar, for abstract representations require a greater mental effort to realize them than the majority of mankind have been trained to give. Our knowledge of the Infinite is negative, and it is impossible to keep a

mere negative conception steadily and constantly before the mind.

If we lose sight of the divine aspect of nature, we become absorbed in the relative and transitory. We are disposed to be content with things as they are, to consecrate the bad as well as the good in nature. The ideal to which we aspire, unless elevated as among the Greeks by æsthetic as well as religious feeling, is not sufficiently raised above the level of the real. We are not likely to rise above mediocrity, or to be moved by enthusiasm to noble deeds. Our repose is not disturbed by undefined longings.

If, on the other hand, we accept some symbolical representation of the Infinite, we are exposed to dangers of a different kind. In order to avoid the risk of confounding the symbol with the rest of nature, we represent it as contrary to nature as well as above it. The miraculous then becomes the divine. The sacred is not merely distinguished from the profane, but is opposed to it. Sacred knowledge is supernatural, and secular knowledge is but folly unless it can be applied to sacred purposes. Spirituality is attained through the mortification of the flesh; holiness is manifested in the suppression of natural desires and pleasures instead of being made consistent with their innocent gratification. There is no gaiety of heart or joyous delight in the things that surround us. We are ever on our guard against the world

as if it were leagued with the devil to effect our ruin. Its pursuits are vain and unsatisfactory; its joys are transitory; its beauty and its pleasures are seductive. Great intensity of feeling is thus attained, but attained at an enormous sacrifice. We cannot but admire this power of renunciation which rises in some cases to the sublime, but at the same time we cannot overlook the fact that it implies a want of confidence in virtue to withstand temptation. There is no defeat, because there has been no encounter. The virtue which is cultivated in the cloister and the cell is a delicate sickly thing in comparison with that which is developed amidst the bustle of life and retained with the liberal gratification of all the natural feelings.

There is another danger to which we are exposed. If the sense of the Infinite be preserved by symbolic representation, the nature and object of the symbol is apt to be misunderstood. The mystery which really exists in everything is very readily supposed to belong in some peculiar manner to the symbol we have adapted to represent it. We worship the symbol for its own sake, confounding the representation with the thing represented. This worship is open to the attacks of scepticism, or crystallizes of itself into the mere observance of forms and rituals. Every symbol must necessarily be taken from nature, and is therefore embraced by science. It has no special signification in itself. That which is worshipped



as a holy relic by one man, is spurned as an old bone or dirty rag by another. A service which excites the most ardent devotion of one sect of religionists seems an empty pageant to another. Science strips all symbolism of its mystery by demonstrating its relation to the rest of nature. It is then perceived that the mystery is not in the symbol exclusively, but in the relation of every phenomenon to the inscrutable Power which it manifests. If the attention is directed to the symbol alone, we are disposed to seek in it that living spirit of religion which is the product of the soul itself. All symbols are apt in time to lose the odour of sanctity, but we often continue to worship them long after their significance is lost.

The highest ideal condition to which we should aspire seems to be to accept the symbol best adapted to our moral and intellectual culture, retaining the consciousness that it is a symbol, and that the highest representation we can form is utterly inadequate to express the mystery of existence.

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